GOOD EARTH

VARANASI

CITY GUIDE

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VARANASI

CITY GUIDE

Varanasi City Guide leads the reader through time and space to understand what the city has been, how it has evolved, and what remains of its past. Interspersed with innumerable myths and legends, it is a guidebook full of historical delight.

Varanasi. Benaras. Kashi. Names of the same city that lies at the spiritual core of every Hindu. Steeped in sanctity, this most blessed of all holy cities, is beloved of the supreme lord, Shiva, and set on the banks of the sacred river, Ganga. The last stop before release from the endless cycle of birth and death.

This detailed guidebook seeks to capture the spirit of Varanasi as well as its physical charms. Over 160 specially-commissioned photographs freeze-frame the city, its architectural splendour as well as its teeming populace. A comprehensive practical information section meets every need from the time you decide to visit the city. The book is the perfect companion not just for the intrepid tourist but also the armchair traveller.

Central Jail
CENTRAL JAIL ROAD
Commissioner's Residence
Ardaly Bazar
Circuit House
Civil Court
Banaras Club
Club
AIRPORT
SARNATH ROAD
DIG COLONY
PREMCHAND
MAQBUL ALAM ROAD
GOLAPURWA
State Bank of India
VARUNA RIVER
LUCKNOW
Ideal Tops
SBI Foreign Exchange
NADESAR
Clark Varanasi
Taj Ganges
Nadesar Palace
Indian Air Lines
Tourist Lodge
THE MALL
NADESAR MARG
Varanasi Ashok
De Paris
CTO
Mint House
Nadesar Bazar
Chandika Devi Mandir
Tourist Office
Raja Bazar
St Mary's Catholic Church
India
Sadar Bazar
Blue Star
PS
VARANASI RS
New Light
Tourist Bungalow
Vijay
Sandona
Narindra
UP Tourist Office
STATION ROAD
Gorkha Golf Club
CARIAPPA MARG
Avneesh
Hindustan International
National Lodge
Kashi Vidyapeeth
PATEL ROAD
Pishach Mochan Tal
VIDYAPEETH MARG
Railway
LAHAR TARA
FATMA ROAD
Bharat Mata Mandir
BAULIA
SIGRA
GRAND TRUNK ROAD
Varuna
Sigra Sports Stadium
ASHOK NAGAR COLONY
Lahar Tara
Kabir Math
SONIA ROAD
Central Garden View
ALLAHABAD
NH 2
MANDUA DIH MARG
SUNDARPUR MARG
ANNIE BESANT ROAD
AURANGABAD ROAD
Mission Church
Siddharth
Foreigner's Registration Office
GURU NANAK
GM Guest Hse
SHIVAJI NAGAR COLONY
SHRI RAMKRISHNA MARG
Manduadih Bazar
Allahabad Bank
MAHAMUR GANJ
Kailash Ashram
RAJA MOTI CHAND ROAD
Mandua Dih RS
SONIABAGH
SUDAMAPUR
Kailashpuri Sewa Ashram
Dwarikadhish Mandir
Shanku Dhara
BAJARDIHA
Khojawan
BHELUPURA
BRU ENCLAVE COLONY
PANCH KOSI MARG
HARISH CHANDRA
International Guest Hse
BANARAS HINDU UNIV

LEGEND

- Arterial Roads
- Major Roads
- Other Roads
- Railway Line
- RS — Railway Line with Station
- Built-up Area
- Park, Garden
- Orchard
- River
- Water Tank
- Church
- Gurudwara
- Mosque
- Temple
- Bank
- Ghat
- Hospital
- Hotel / Guest Hse
- PS — Police Station
- CTO — Central Telegraph Office
- GPO — General Post Office

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GOOD EARTH

VARANASI

PANCHKOSI ROAD
ASHOK NAGAR COLONY
Sona Talab
VARUNA RIVER
Nakhi Ghat
Delwaria
NORTHERN RAILWAY
SARIAN
NH 2
Varanasi City RS
RAJ GHAT MARG
GRAND TRUNK ROAD
GAURISHANKAR PRASAD MARG
JAITPURA
Bus Stand
SBI
ADAMPUR
Agricultural School
Gandhian Institute
RAJ GHAT
State Bank of India
Adi Keshav Mandir
Kashi RS
PS
LAHURABIR
Buddha
KOTWALI
RABINDRANATH TAGORE RD
Malviya Bridge
Raj Ghat
Rani Ghat
Prahlad Ghat
Naya Ghat
Trilochan Ghat
Sakka Ghat
Gola Ghat
Gai Ghat
SANT KABIR ROAD
SP Gupta
Baradari
GPO
Kotwali PS
Pradeep
Town Hall
Kal Bhairav Mandir
KOLKATA →
MUGHAL SARAI →
Vindumadhava Mandir
Alamgir's Masjid
Lal Ghat
NAI SARAK
Beniya Bagh
CHOWK
Panchganga Ghat
Ram Ghat
Bhaunsla Ghat
Manikarnika Ghat
Burning Ghat
GODOULIA
Clock Tower
Kashi Vishwanath Mandir
Ganga Mahal Ghat
Gyanvapi Masjid
Scindia Ghat
Lalita Ghat
Mir Ghat
Raja Jai Singh Observatory
Man Mandir Ghat
St Thomas Church
Rajendra Prasad Ghat
Central
Dasashwamedh Ghat
Lodge
Ahilya Bai Ghat
Rana Mahal Ghat
Chausatti Ghat
Pandey Ghat
Raja Ghat
Narad Ghat
Shameshwar Ghat
Kedar Ghat
Lali Ghat
Harishchandra Ghat
Burning Ghat
Hanuman Ghat
Sandhya Guest Hse
Shivala Ghat
Panch Kot Ghat
Jain Ghat
Bachchharaj Ghat
Anandmayee Ghat
Janki Ghat
Tulsidas Ghat
Assi Ghat
SONARPUR ROAD
Mata Anandmayee Ashram
Ganges View
Temple on Ganges
Durga Mandir
PANDIT MADANMOHAN MALVIYA MG
Math Madhnali Bandar
Pushkar Talab
Nagwa Ghat
NAGWA
Heritage
Women's College
RAM NAGAR ROAD
GANGA RIVER
Jnana Pravah
Pantoon Bridge Oct to June
Ram Nagar Ghat
Ram Nagar Fort & Museum
PS
RAM NAGAR
CHUNAR
NH 7
Art & Archaeological Centre
Durga Mandir
Janakpur Mandir
War Memorial
Girja Mandir
Lovett

N

0 0.5 Km 1.0 1.5 2.0 Km

OLD CITY

Allahabad Bank
Trimurti Lodge
Clock Tower
PO
Golden Lodge
Kashi Vishwanath Mandir
Auto Rickshaw Stand
NAI SARAK
GODOULIA
Seema
SBI
Gyanvapi Masjid
Godoulia Chowk
Tripti
Lalita Ghat
LUXA RD
BOB
Annapurna Mandir
DASASHWAMEDH GHAT
Mir Ghat
Alka
St Thomas Church
Auto Rickshaw Stand
Lara
MG
Tripura Bhairavi Ghat
Central
Man Mandir Ghat
SONARPUR RD
Kumiko
Dasashwamedh Ghat
Dasashwamedh Lodge
Sita GH
SBI
Ahilya Bai Ghat
GANGA RIVER
NOT TO SCALE

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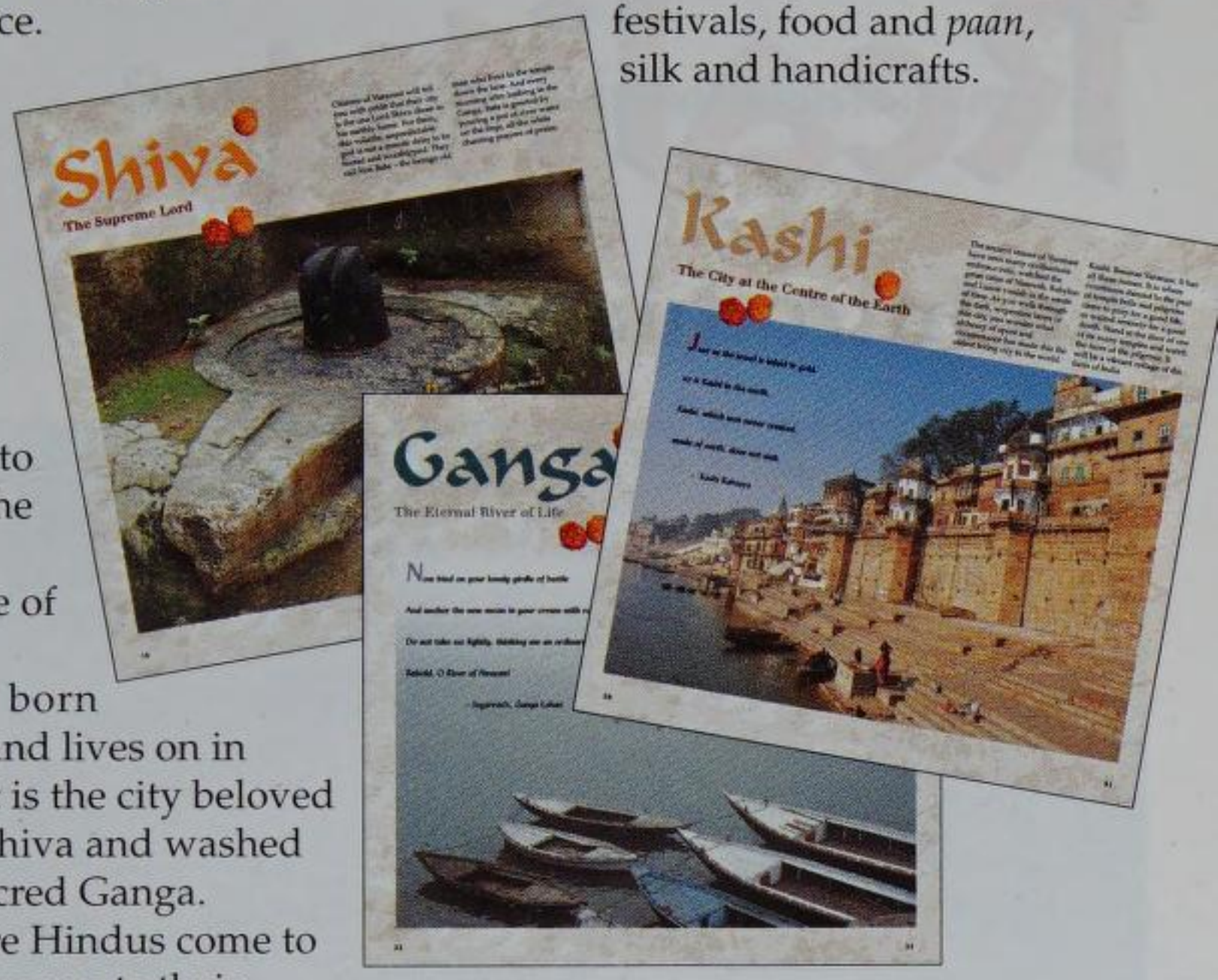
About the Guide

Varanasi. Kashi. Benaras. This city with three names is among the oldest living cities in the world. Varanasi was the township that grew along the banks of the holy Ganga, in the stretch between its two tributaries, the Varuna and the Assi. Called Kashi in the scriptures and widely known as Benaras, the city was officially renamed Varanasi after India gained Independence.



- The first section of this Guide, *Varanasi: The Other Reality*, attempts to capture the spiritual resonance of the city. Kashi is born in myth and lives on in legend. It is the city beloved of Lord Shiva and washed by the sacred Ganga. It is where Hindus come to die or to venerate their dead. Kashi, literally 'luminous', is also the city illumined by learning and even today the tradition of Hindu scholarship lives on here.

- The second section, *The Varanasi Experience*, takes the traveller through the city as it is. Detailed text and stunning photographs bring alive the bustle of the lanes and *bazaars*, the temples and the *ghats*.

- The famous Buddhist pilgrimage town of Sarnath, and Ramnagar, the seat of the Kashi Maharajas, are also covered in detail.

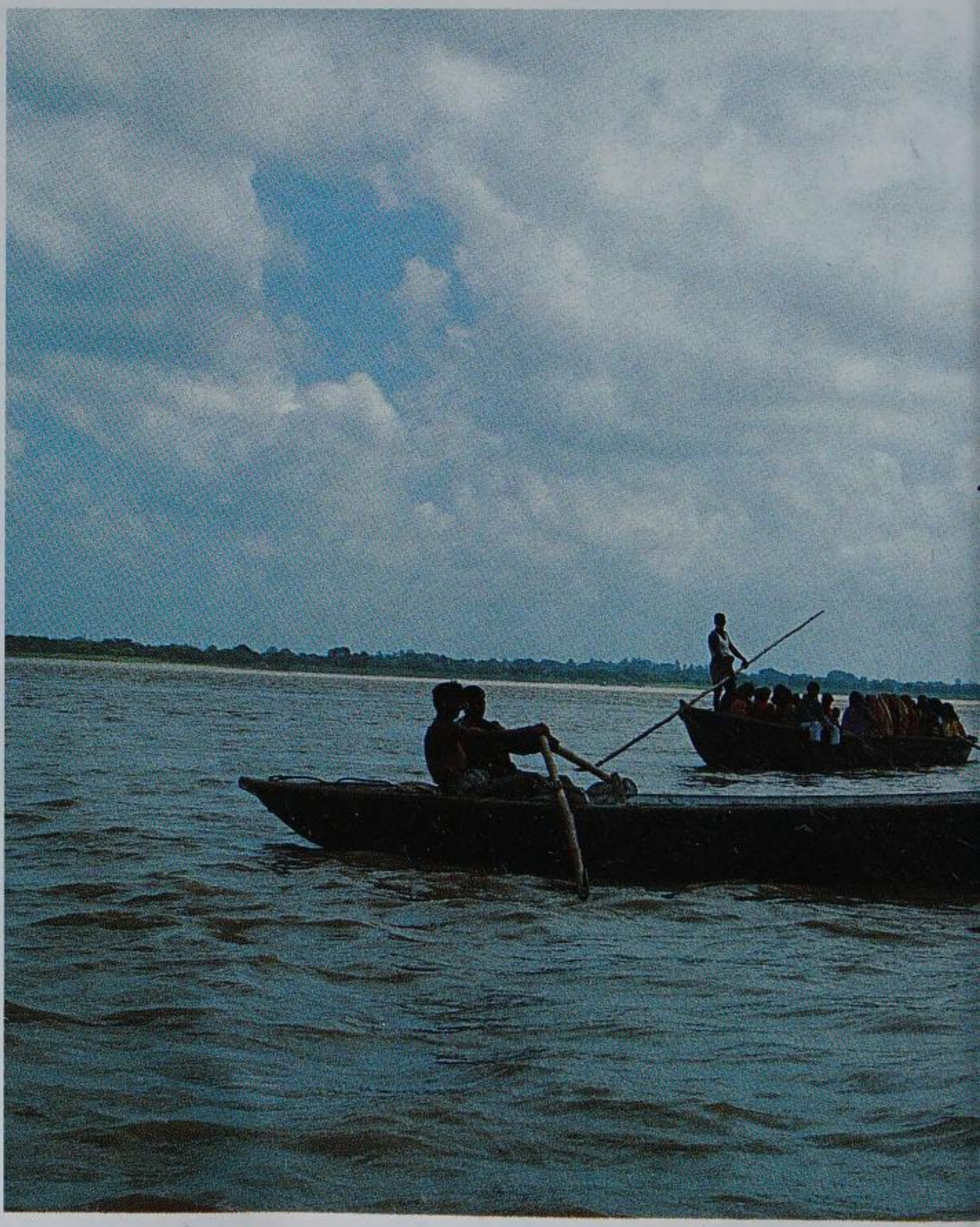
- The people of Varanasi are passionate about the good life. This is a city awash with the spirit of *mauj-masti*. And any experience of it is incomplete without an acquaintance with its festivals, food and *paan*, silk and handicrafts.

- The *Practical Information* and *Travellers' Needs* sections are aimed at facilitating your passage to and through Varanasi. Visa formalities, health precautions, travel details, have all been comprehensively compiled.

Exhaustive listings of hotels, guesthouses and restaurants tell the traveller where to stay and where to eat. A comprehensive glossary and a phrase-book from English to Hindi will ease the traveller's way through Varanasi.

Varanasi: The Other Reality

An Introduction

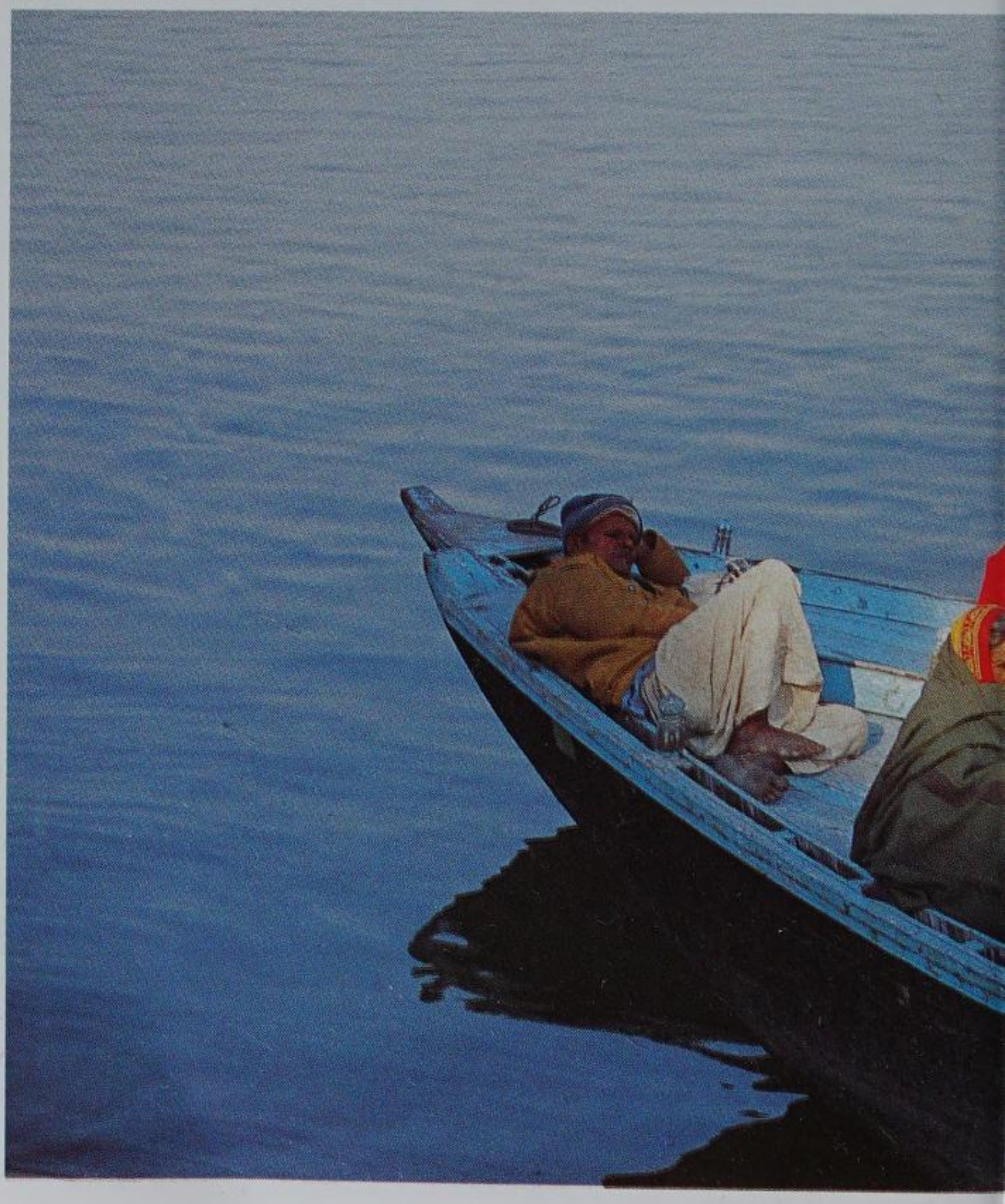


Brahma once weighed the heavens against Kashi.
And Kashi, being heavier, sank downward; while
the skies, despite all the gods who lived there,
rose upwards.

Shankaracharya, *Manikarnikastotram*

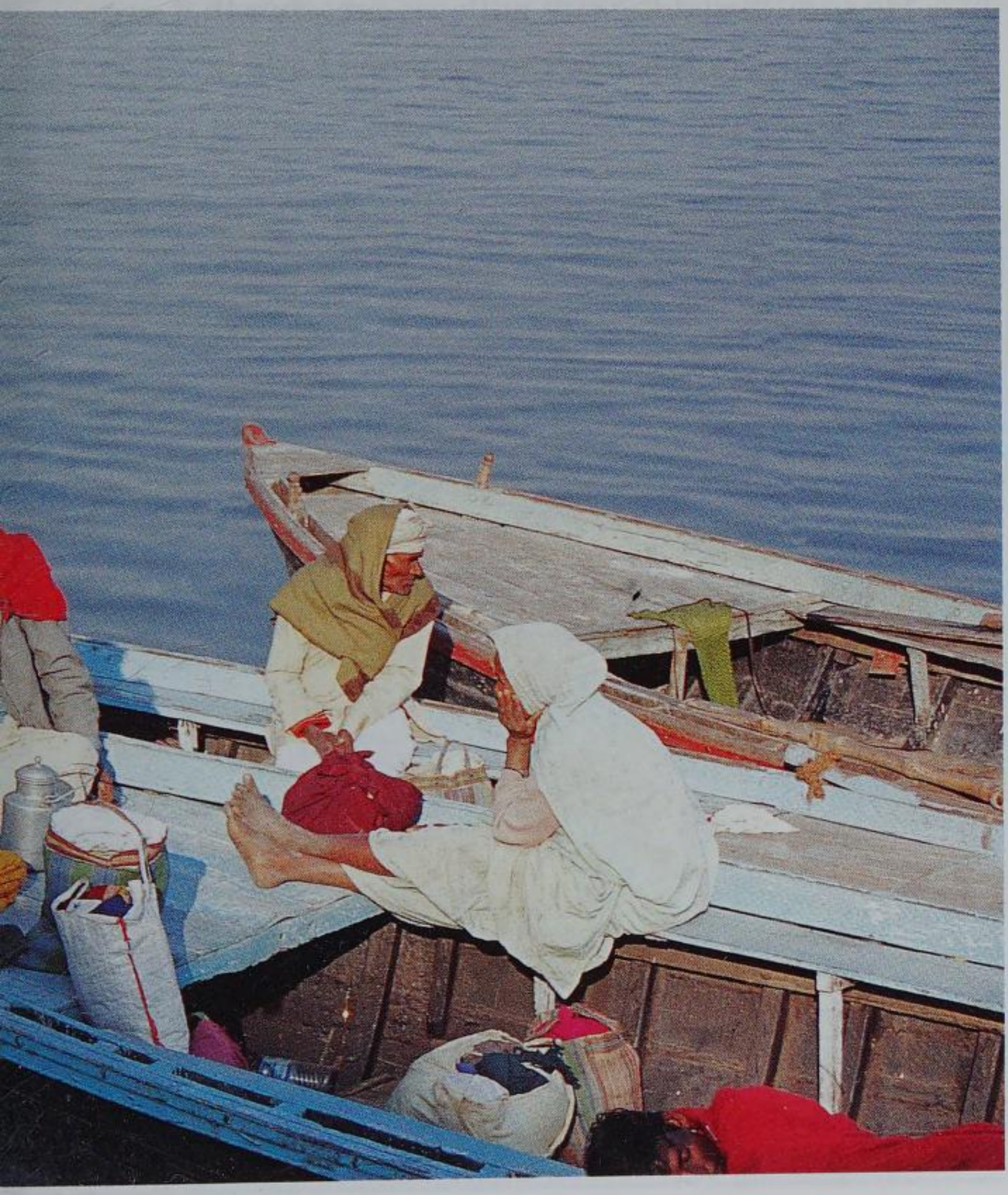
Kashi outweighed the heavens because the whole cosmos is contained within its five *kroshas*. All that is auspicious in creation is here. All that is powerful and sacred is here. All the 330 million gods are here. All knowledge resides here. All *tirthas* are here. All eight directions radiate from here. All time is born here. Yet, though Kashi forms the heart of the *mandala* of creation, it is above it. It is *lokattara* or transcendent.

The city sits atop Shiva's *trishul* or trident, removed from the world and unmoved by its rhythms. It is indestructible and incorruptible.



While the world around it goes from sin to worse, Kashi lives in a permanent state of purity. It remains rooted in the *Krita Yuga* or the Age of Perfection while the rest of creation has degenerated to the *Kali Yuga* or the Age of Imperfection.

And when Brahma periodically lets loose *pralaya,* the floodwaters that destroy all that he created, Kashi alone remains unscathed. It sits serene on Shiva's *trishul*: 'When all inert things sink, she, made of consciousness and bliss, does not sink. Were Kashi herself submerged, how could she rescue others?' asks the *Kashi Rahasya*.



It was this salvation which Kashi promises that first drew Shiva to it. Having sliced off Brahma's fifth head in a paroxysm of anger, the blue-necked god wandered the three worlds for endless aeons, searching for salvation. But to no avail: Brahma's skull continued to stick to his hand, and the fury Brahmahatya continued to dog his footsteps. It was only when he entered the sacred precincts of Kashi that Brahmahatya melted away and the skull dropped from his fingers.

So it was that Shiva made Kashi his own. And when he needed a suitably luminous home for his new bride, Parvati, it was here that Shiva came to live. He so suffused the city with his presence that the very stones of Kashi became Shiva – *Kashi ke kankar Shiv Shankar.*

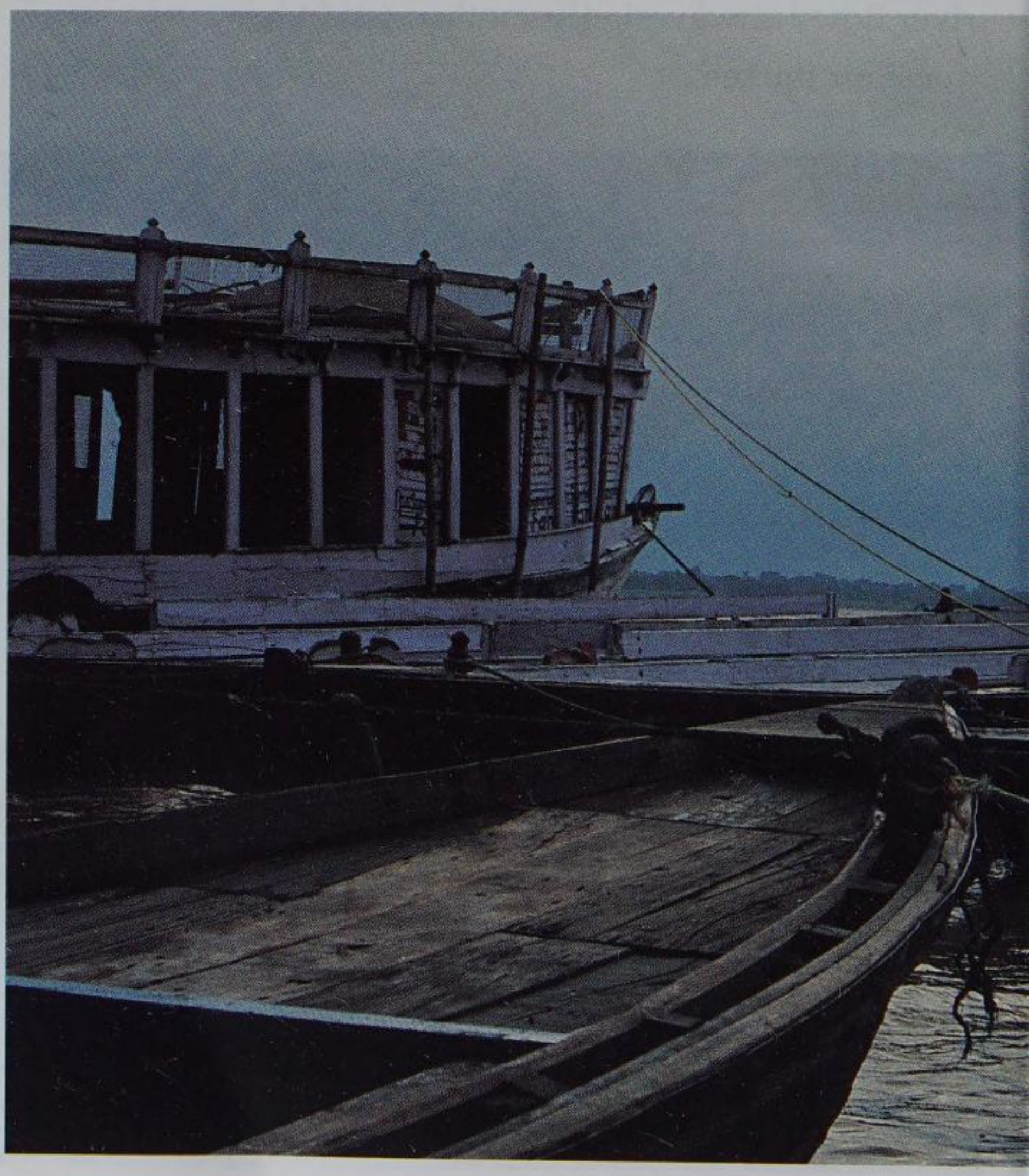
In Kashi, there is no piece of land, not even one as small as a *til* or sesame seed, that does not bear the mark of Shiva, the *linga*. The god once counted the *lingas* in Kashi for Parvati and gave up after a hundred billion.

The *jyotirlinga* or the *linga* of light, also resides here, giving Kashi the luminosity to dispel ignorance and untruth. Kashi thus is the fount of all knowledge, an attribute commemorated in the seven steps a young Brahmin boy takes towards Kashi during his *upnayana* or initiation ceremony.

Kashi is cosseted not only by Shiva but also by Ganga. Once she touches the earth, the heavenly river flows unwaveringly southwards in her quest for the sea.

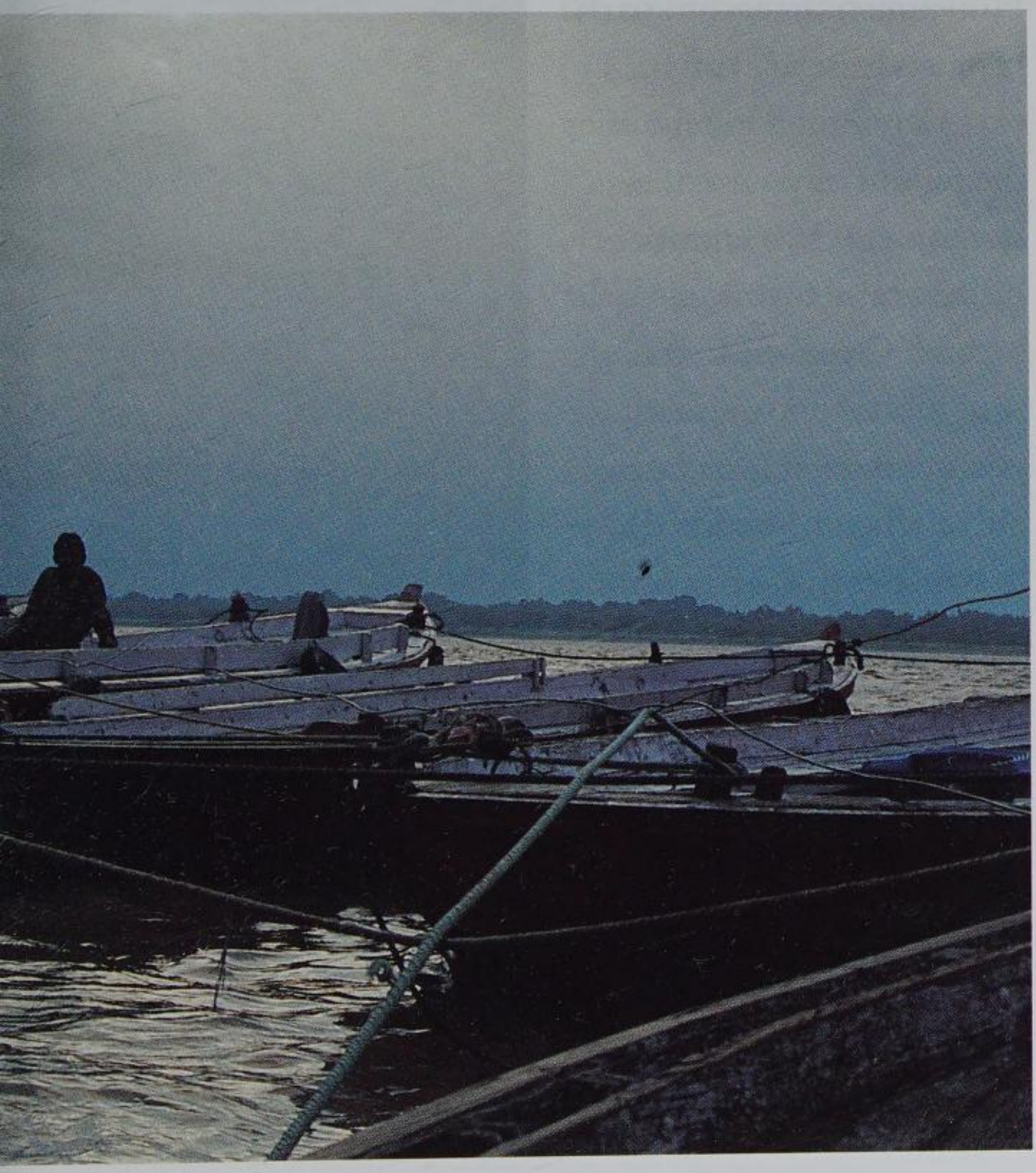
The only time she flows north is at Kashi, when she alters her divine course just to wash the banks of the holy city. Here she is *Gangamaiyya*, the mother who nourishes the very soul of Kashi, nurturing its life, sanctifying its rituals and gathering up its dead.

Being holy in untold ways, Kashi is then the holiest *tirtha* or ford across *samsara*, the river of life. A visit to any *tirtha* bestows *punya* on the pilgrim; but a visit to this city bestows spiritual benefit beyond measure. The rites and rituals of *dharma* get magnified manifold in Kashi. It is said that an *upvasa* or fast for three days in Kashi equals thousands of years of asceticism.



Kashi is also the most blessed of the *saptapuri* or the seven holy cities that grant *moksha* or eternal escape from the cycle of life and death. The other six cities, however, can only offer indirect liberation – if you die there, you are reborn for the last time in Kashi. The ultimate guarantee of *moksha* comes only from dying in Kashi, for *Kashivam maranam muktiha* or death in Kashi is liberation.

And this is because Kashi is thrice-blessed. It is holy in its very existence as the City of Light; it is washed eternally by the heavenly Ganga; and it is only here that Shiva himself whispers the *taraka mantra* in the ears of the dying.



The *taraka* or ferryboat *mantra* contains the ultimate wisdom that will help one cross the river of *samsara* and only those who die in Kashi get the ultimate blessing of Shiva's revelation.

However, Kashi is not indiscriminate in its promise of liberation. Shiva's trusted lieutenant Kala Bhairava wields the *bhairavi yatana* or Bhairava's Punishment to accord each his just desserts. You experience, in a moment, the fallout of your entire *karma* – you live countless births and rebirths in a split second. Cleansed to the soul in that one moment, you are then able to face Shiva when he bends down to whisper the secret *mantra* of release.

For centuries, people have thronged Kashi to live here until they die. And it is not just the *mumukshus* or those who have renounced the world, who come here; it is also the householder who

has discharged his worldly responsibilities and now wants to steep himself in piety until he dies. It is also the widow, who has no role left in the family after her husband's death and who comes to Kashi to wait till she can join him.

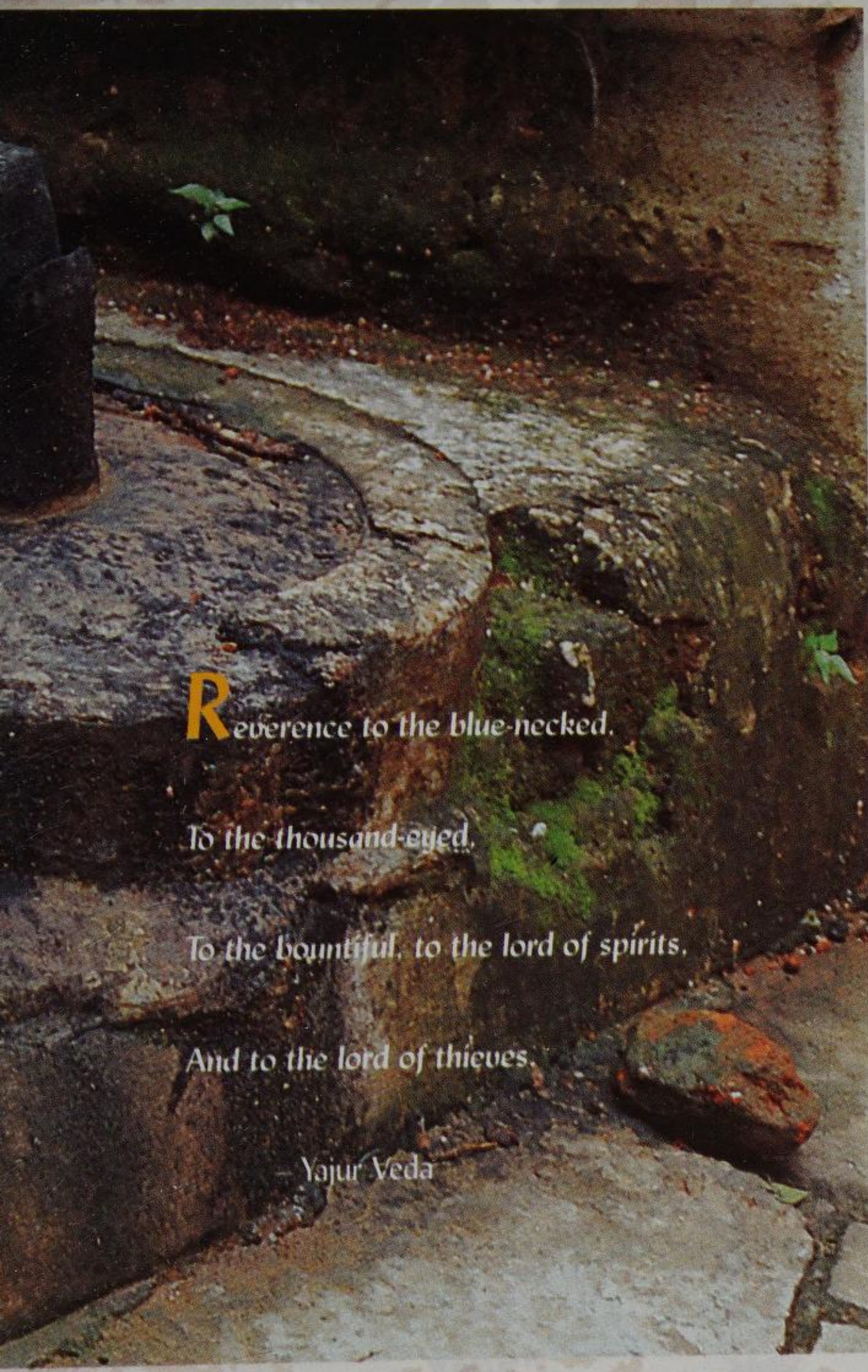
But, not everyone who comes seeking the grace of death in Kashi can be sure of getting it. Shiva has forsaken the job of running the unmitigated sinner out of Kashi to Dandapani, the *gana* who is the sheriff of Kashi. He shapes circumstances to ensure that the unworthy leave the city precincts before they die. Death in Kashi is a blessing and not everyone can be blessed.

It is this city, policed by Dandapani, governed by Kala Bhairava, illumined by knowledge, loved by Shiva and eternally washed by Ganga that is Kashi. The town bound by geographical grid-points is not the real Kashi.

Shiva

The Supreme Lord

Citizens of Varanasi will tell you with pride that their city is the one Lord Shiva chose as his earthly home. For them, this volatile, unpredictable god is not a remote deity to be feared and worshipped. They call him *Baba* – the benign old man who lives in the temple down the lane. And every morning after bathing in the Ganga, *Baba* is greeted by pouring a pot of river water on the *linga*, all the while chanting prayers of praise.

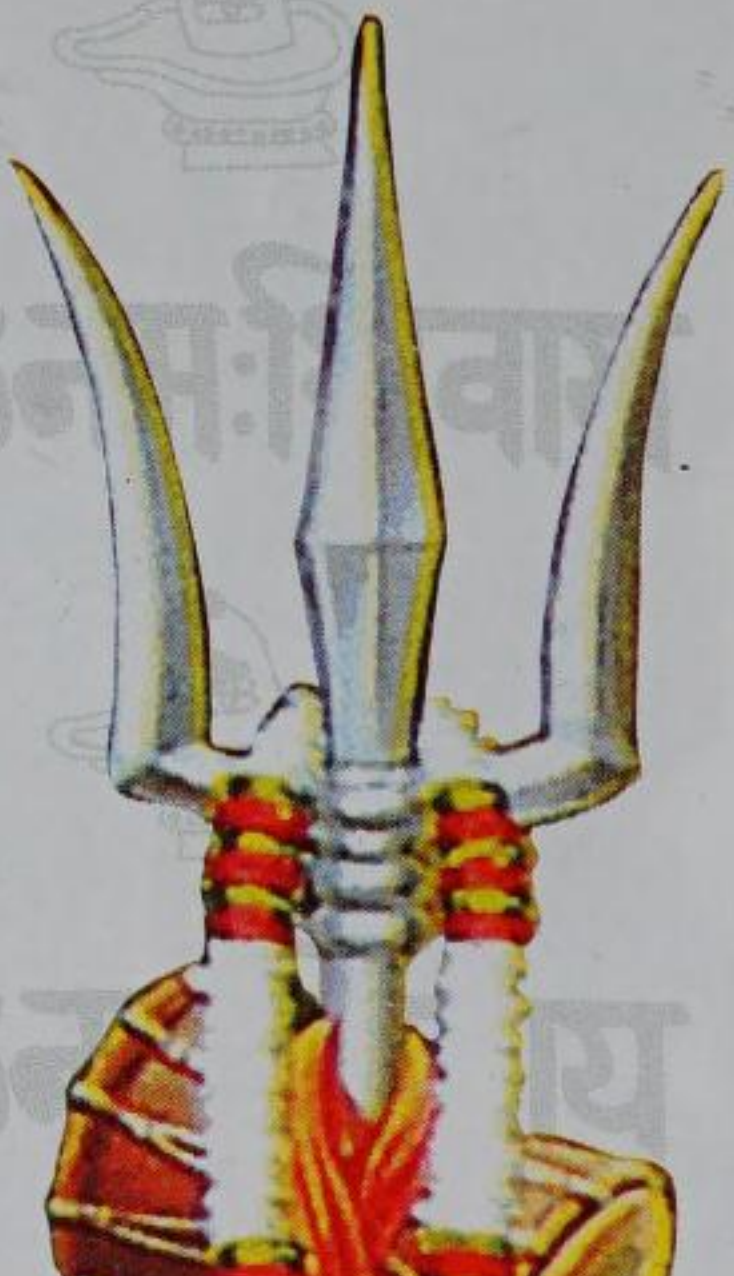

Reverence to the blue-necked.
To the thousand-eyed.
To the bountiful, to the lord of spirits.
And to the lord of thieves.
– Yajur Veda

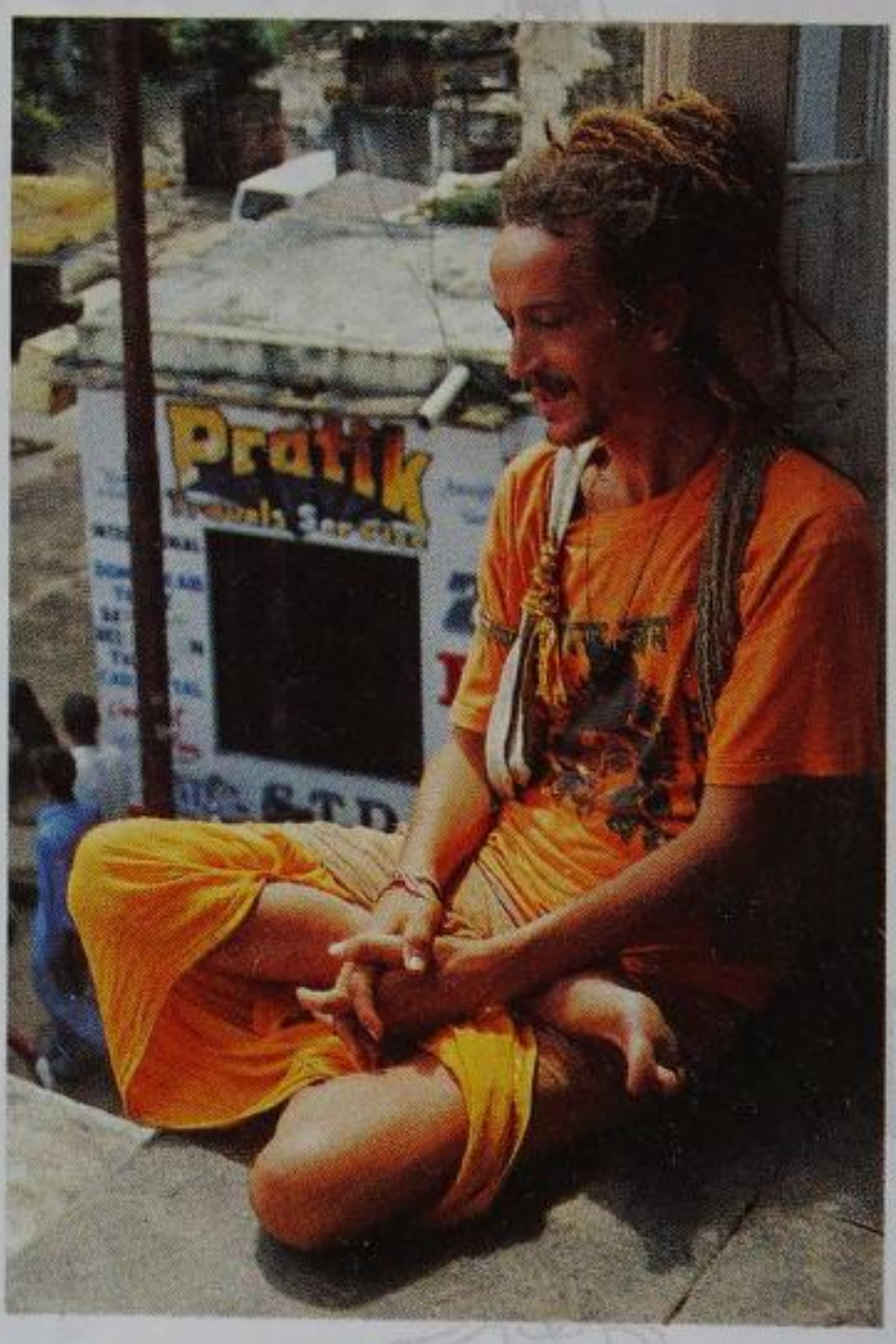
What Brahma creates, Vishnu preserves, but Shiva is both the creator and the destroyer. He provides the inevitable end to everything, so that creation can take place again. When the world becomes full of sin, an enraged Shiva dances the magnificent *tandava* to end it all. Then, with Parvati, his female aspect or *shakti*, he participates in the creation of a new world.

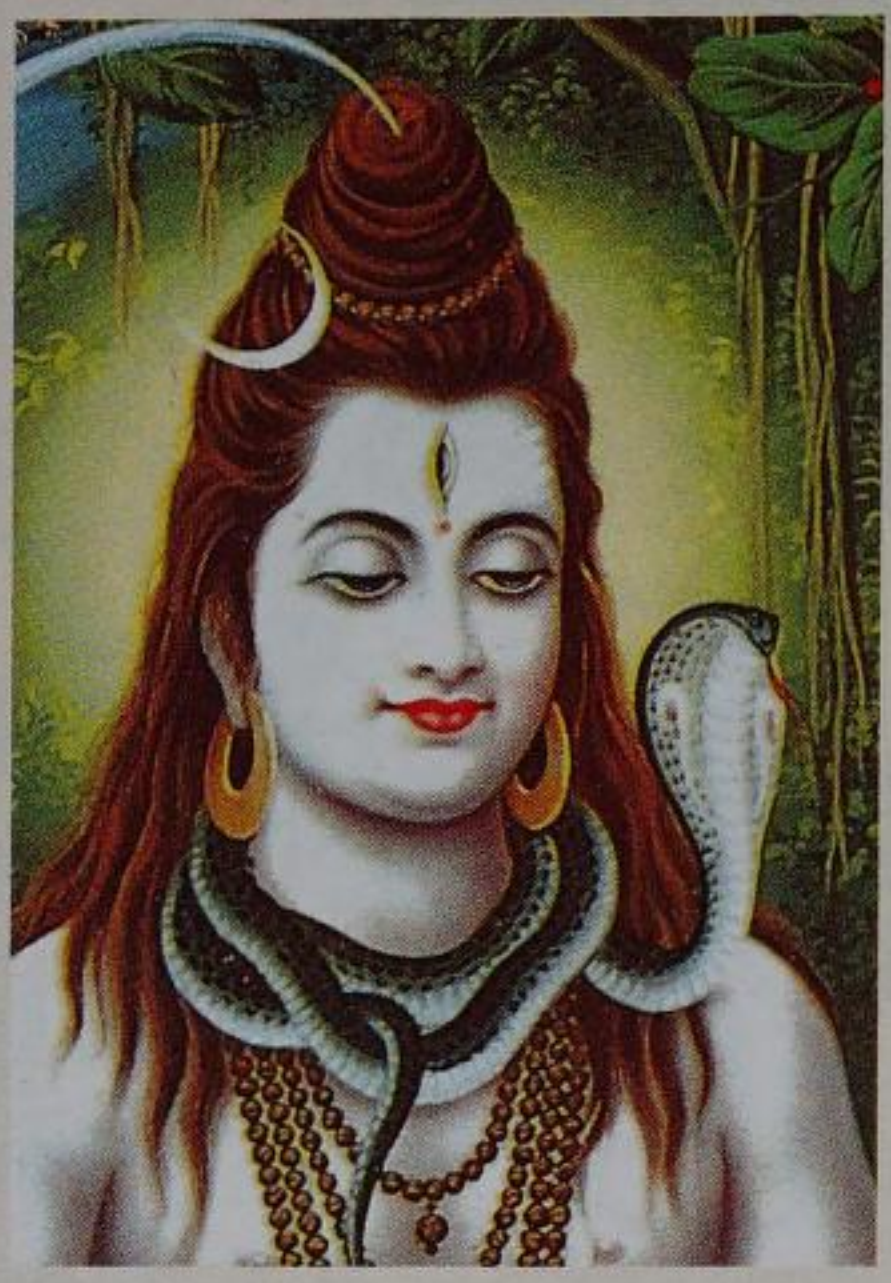
The earliest aspect of Shiva mentioned in the *Vedas* is that of Rudra, the Angry One. Scholars think the archetype of Shiva was a god of animals worshipped in the pre-Aryan Indus Valley Civilisation. Over the centuries Shiva rose through the pantheon, ultimately taking his place in the Hindu Trinity.

Shiva is not perfect: He is easy to anger, easier to please, prone to impulsive mistakes. It is because of this that he is loved so deeply by his devotees. Somehow, you feel that this many-hued god will listen to your prayers more kindly, understand your frailties better. And to seek his blessings you have to come to his special city – the ever-luminous Kashi. Here, Shiva is everywhere – in the great Vishwanath Temple, at the corner shrine, and under the Banyan tree.

Shiva's heavenly home is in Mount Kailash in the Himalayas. There he lives like an ascetic, with long, matted hair and his body covered in ash from cremation grounds. He has three eyes, the third opening when he is angry. Snakes writhe in his hair and around his neck and he wanders the earth carrying his trident, his *damru* or rattle drum and a begging bowl. The wandering ascetic, the *sadhu*, is his human image.







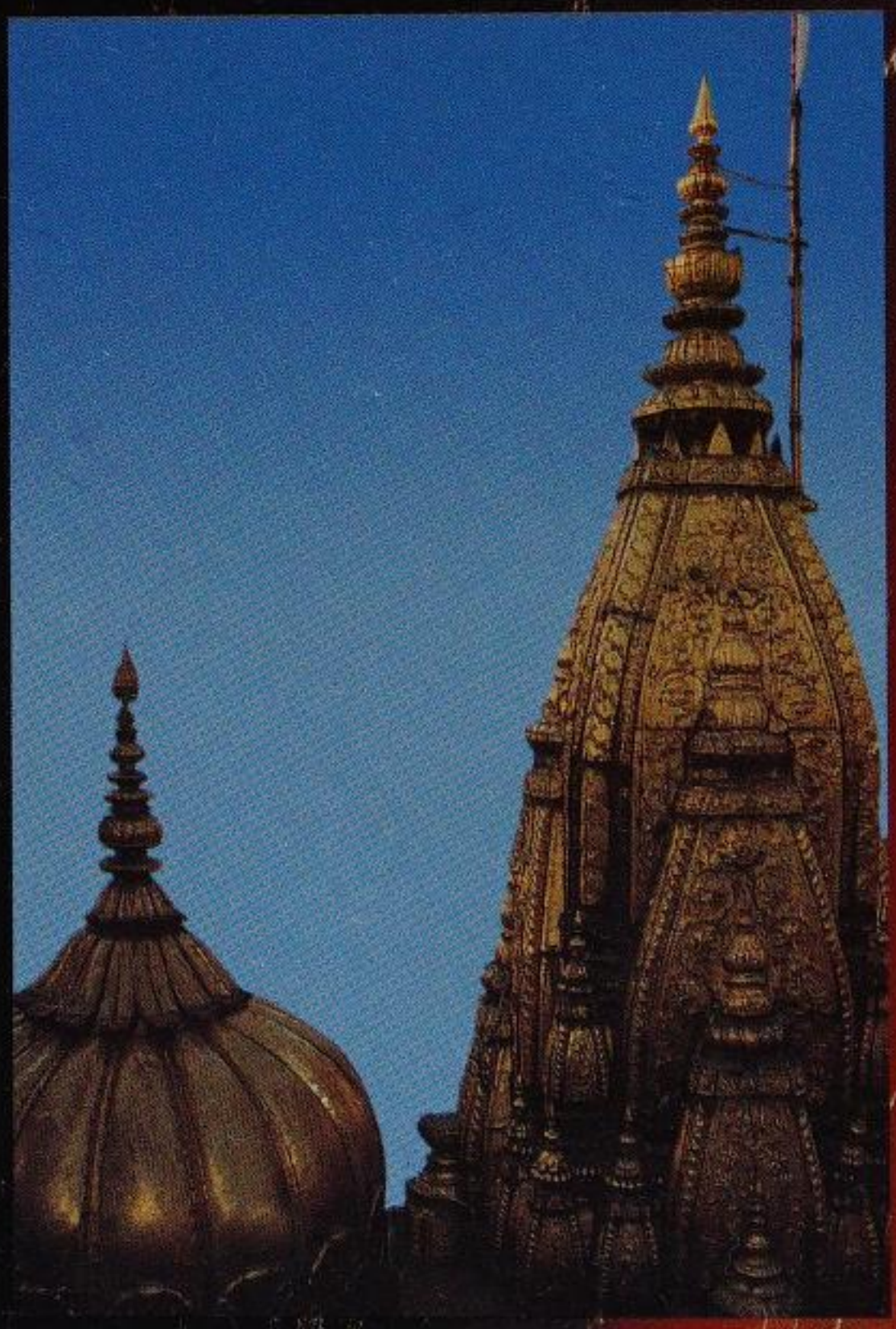
But Shiva has a benign face. As Parvati's husband and the father of Ganesha and Kartikeya, sandalwood paste replaces the ash on his body, and his hair is adorned with the crescent moon.

Shiva's mythical association with Varanasi began with his wedding. When he married Parvati, he had to look for a home to live in. Shiva and his bride searched far and wide until their eyes fell on Kashi, a city of truly resplendent beauty.

The *Kashikhanda* describes the wonderous city: 'Its very earth was completely studded with a multitude of different kinds of jewels and the brilliance of the rubies of its many palaces filled the sky. The city illumined the four directions with the many golden pinnacles that topped its mansions. It surpassed even the paradise of the gods with the profusion of flying banners'. And so the celestial couple came and settled here.

ॐ नम

Another tale has Shiva marking the site of Kashi with a moving column of fire – the *jyotirlinga* or the *linga* of light. The *linga* is the phallic shaft that symbolises the creative energy of the universe and it is this aspect of Shiva that is most commonly worshipped. The story of the *jyotirlinga* as given in the *Kashikhanda* is connected with the perpetual argument between Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva as to who is supreme. To the amazement of the others, the *Vedas* testify to the supremacy of Shiva. As Brahma and Vishnu began to protest, an immense column of fire split the earth between them and pierced the heavens.



The golden spires of Vishwanath Temple

The two decided to discover its source. Vishnu turned himself into a boar and burrowed deep into the earth, and Brahma transformed himself into a bird and soared to the heavens. But, even after a millennium their search did not yield results.

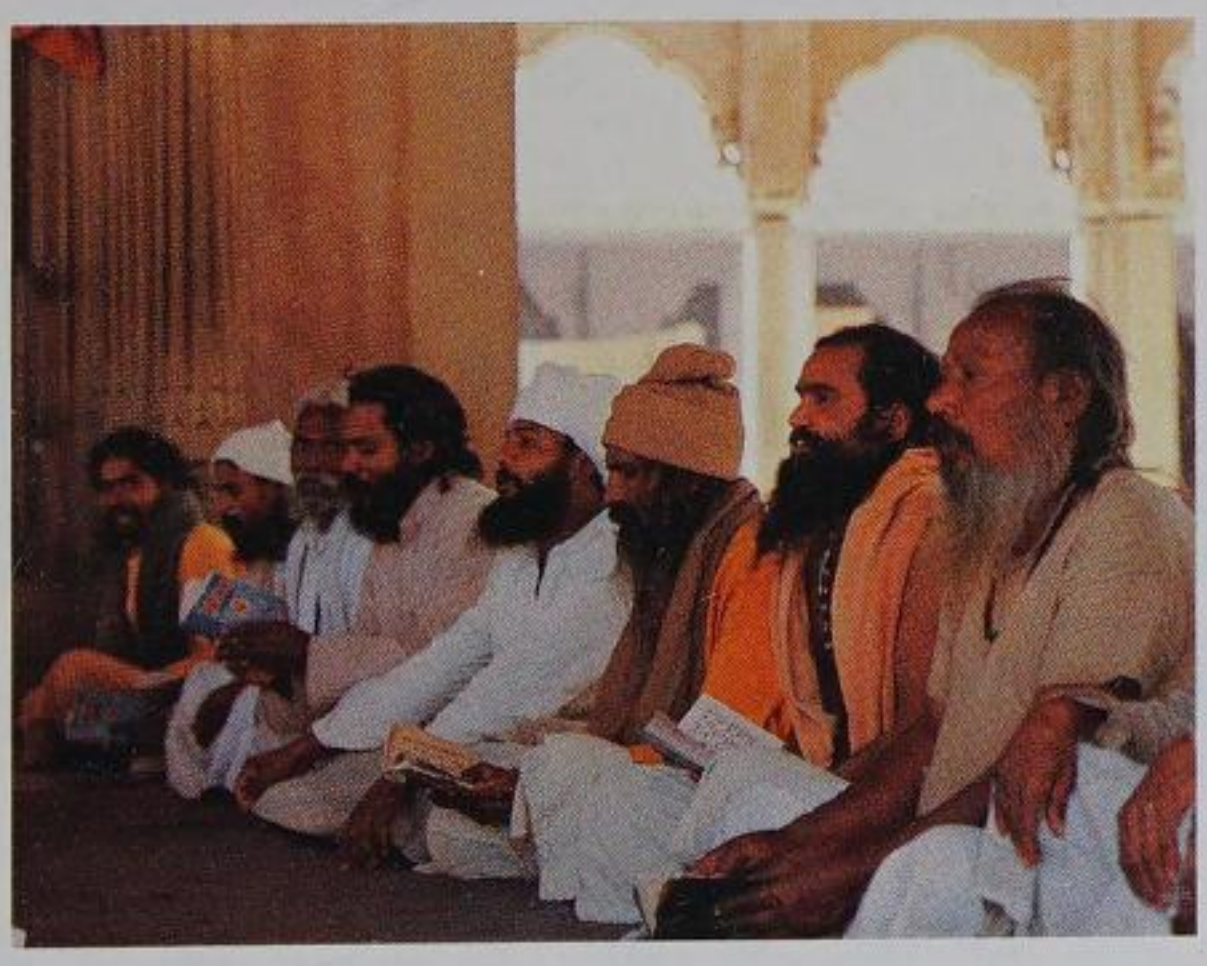
Vishnu was the first to admit defeat and returned to worship Shiva, but Brahma, as the oldest of the three, was reluctant to do so. He even called on a *ketaki* flower to bear false witness to his claim that he had seen the end of the fiery pillar. Shiva, always quick to anger, took the form of the terrible Bhairava and cut off one of Brahma's five heads for the travesty of truth. It was thus that Brahma became the four-faced god that we know. Three temples in Varanasi claim to be the site of the *jyotirlinga* – Omkareshwar, Avimukteshwar and Vishwanath.

Vishwanath Temple is near Dasashwamedh Ghat and the shrine to Avimukteshwar is within its precincts.

The ancient temple of Omkareshwar, behind Trilochana Ghat, is a forgotten shrine, seldom visited by pilgrims.

The spiritual map of the city of Shiva is like a traditional *mandala* of ever-growing circles. The largest circle is Kashi, which includes the outskirts of the city. The next is Varanasi, the region that lies between the two rivers, Varuna and Asi, that join the Ganga here. Within this is the circle of Avimukta, the city free of sin. Finally, the innermost circle is around the Vishwanath Temple called Antargriha, the inner *sanctum*.

As you wander down the narrow lanes and riverside *ghats* of Varanasi you will see Shiva manifest everywhere. The *linga* lies under wayside trees and in a multitude of temples, his face is painted in garish hues on the walls, the *sadhus* carry his trident and prayer beads. As people talk he is invoked and called as witness. You don't have to seek Shiva in Kashi; just wait and he will come to you.



Left:
Shiva so permeates Varanasi that even this Hanuman temple has a linga enshrined in it.

The Many Names of Lord Shiva

Visitors are often confused by the many names by which the people of Varanasi call Shiva. Every Shiva temple has its own name for the god, and every myth is about a different aspect of the god. The litany of Shiva's names is unending. Here are some of the more common ones:

Gangadhar
Karunakar
Kailashi
Avinash
Tripurari
Rajarajeshwar

Kedareshwar
Avimukteshwar
Somnath
Brihadishwar
Vaidyanath
Baneshwar

Bhimeshwar
Tarakeshwar
Bhadreshwar
Narmadeshwar
Niranjan
Bhootnath

Rameshwar
Nageshwar
Kashipati
Ghanteshwar
Girijapati
Paresh

Shashishekar
Bholanath
Vamdev
Virupaksha
Dinesh
Badrinath

Nandeshwar
Bhavbhootnath
Amarnath
Yogeshwar
Maheshwar
Sadagati

Kailashpati
Sadashiv
Vishweshwar
Vishwanath
Siddheshwar

Harihar
Jaleshwar
Khageshwar
Maharudra
Karunasagar
Mahadev

Baneshwar

Dhurjati
Triguna
Neelkanth
Chidanand
Chintamani
Yameshwar

Bakreshwar
Mritunjay
Dikpati
Shankar
Pashupati

Nataraja
Shambhu
Gaganvihari
Pinaki
Ishan
Mahakala

Kapadri
Veerbhadra
Neelalohit
Vishnuballabh
Kapali
Rajrajshekhar

Devadhidev
Kardameshwar

Umapati
Sarvanand
Chandrashekhar
Chandrachudamani

How Shiva lost his city

There was a time, long years ago, when a drought on earth lasted sixty years. Neither the gods nor men could save the earth from this terrible plight. Only King Ripunjaya had the moral stature to salvage the situation, so Lord Brahma turned to him. Ripunjaya agreed, but on one condition – all the gods living on earth must return to the heavens. Reluctantly the gods departed; among them was Shiva, desolate on leaving his beloved Kashi. Then Ripunjaya occupied the throne of the world with the title Divodasa or servant of the gods.

With Divodasa's meritorious actions, the earth once again became prosperous. But Shiva, exiled on Mount Kailash, pined for Kashi. He could, however, return only if Divodasa wavered from his moral path. A series of temptations were sent the good king's way. To Shiva's distress not only did the various gods and goddesses fail to tempt the good king, they also chose to stay back in Kashi, making the city home to all the 330 million gods.

Then Brahma came down to earth and challenged Divodasa to perform *das* or ten *ashwamedha yagnas*. The *ashwamedha* was a sacrifice in which a horse was set out to roam and, wherever it wandered, the king of that region had to acknowledge the supremacy of the horse's royal owner, or else fight the army that followed the horse. Once the horse returned, it was sacrificed in a sacred fire. Divodasa successfully performed the ten *yagnas* and the horses were duly sacrificed at Dasashwamedh Ghat. Brahma, too, had failed to vanquish Divodasa.

Finally, Vishnu came to Shiva's rescue. Arriving in the guise of a Buddhist monk he preached a new religion, inimical to the Hindu social order of *dharma* and caste. Divodasa converted to the new faith and, for this lapse, was forced to abandon Kashi.

Shiva returned in triumph and rewarded Vishnu by giving him a home in his beloved city. That is how at the important *ghat* of Manikarnika in Varanasi, it is Vishnu who reigns supreme.

Ganga

The Eternal River of Life

Now bind on your lovely girdle of battle

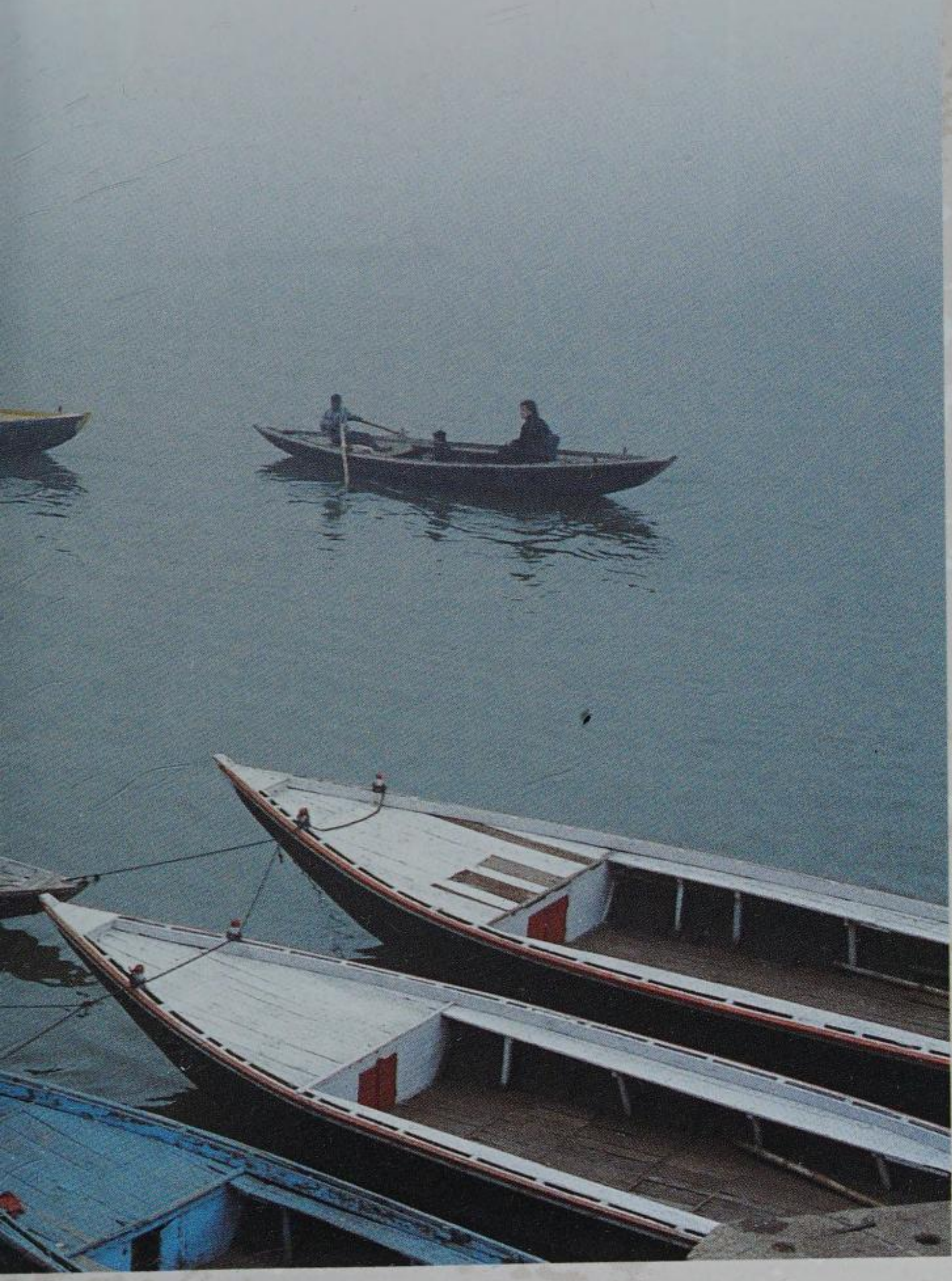
And anchor the new moon in your crown with ropes of snakes.

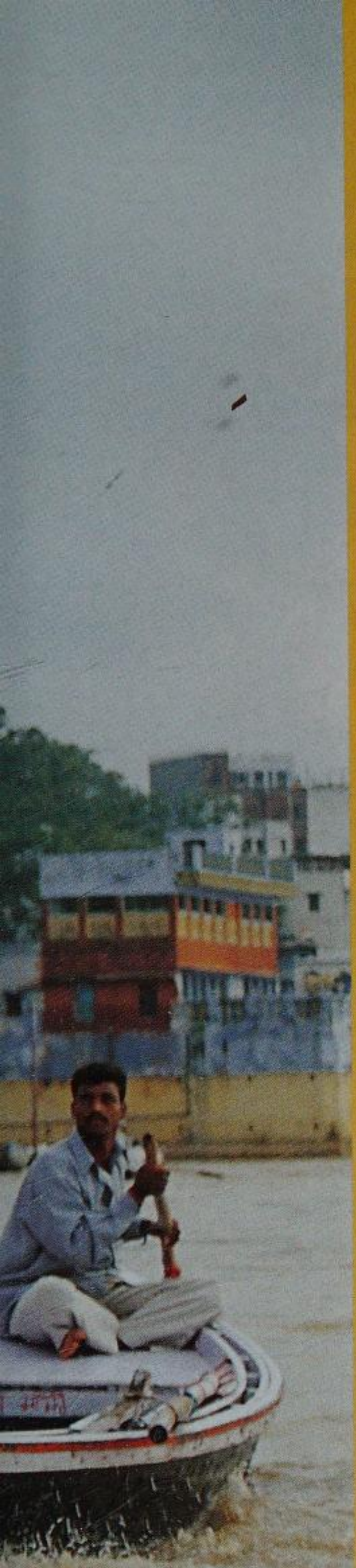
Do not take me lightly, thinking me an ordinary sinner

Behold, O River of Heaven!

– Jagannath, *Ganga Lahari*

Stroll down the steps of any *ghat* on a winter dawn, wake up a sleepy boatman and get him to row you slowly upstream. As the boat floats out silently, the night gray waters lapping the oars, look up to the eastern sky where the edges of the clouds are turning pink. The sun god Surya's golden light will greet his devotees as they wait reverentially for him, standing chest deep in the river, holding its holy waters in their cupped hands.



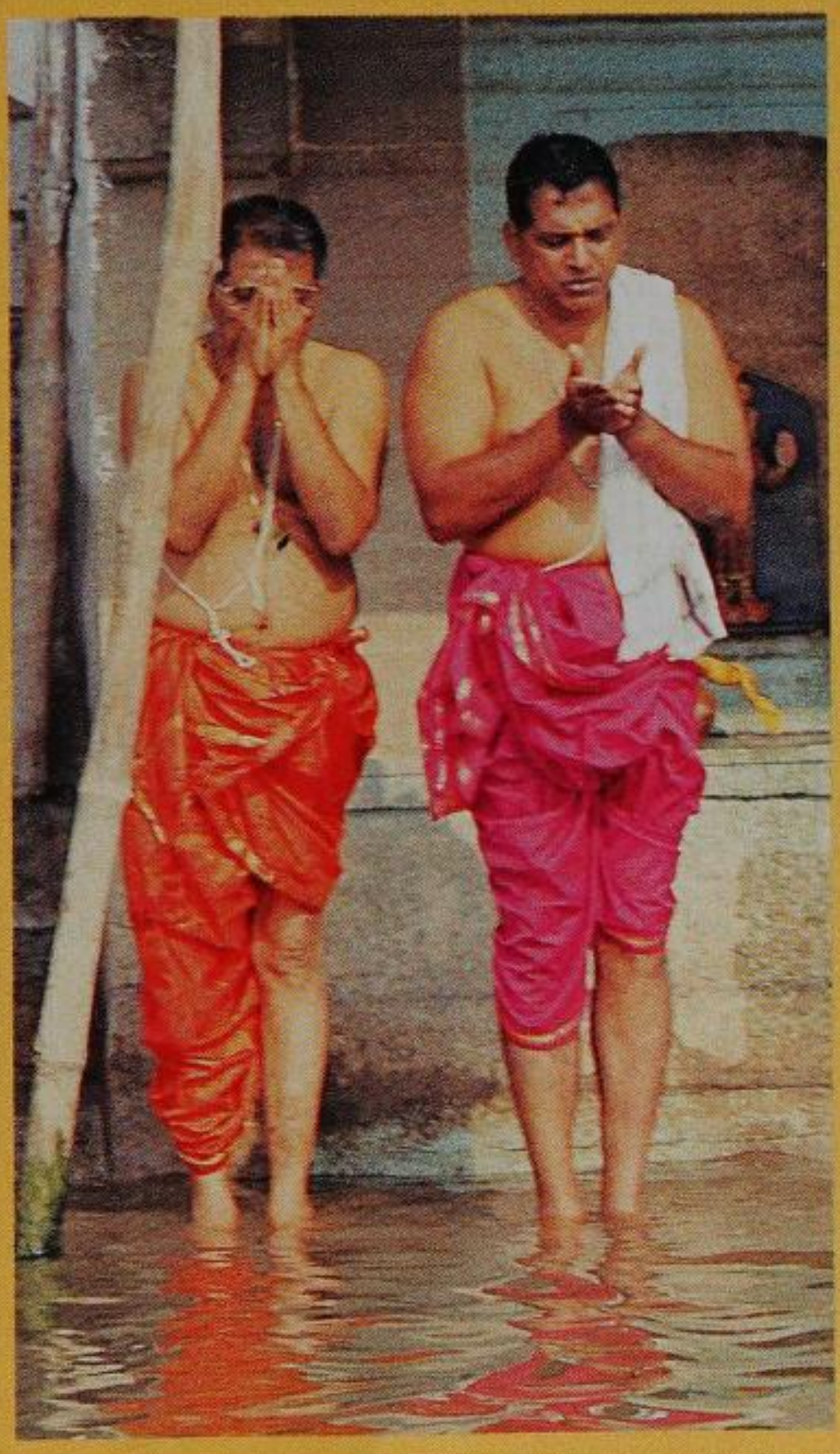


And, the chanting of the Rig Veda hymn, the *Gayatri Mantra,* reverberates from *ghat* to *ghat* as the thousands gathered on the banks of the Ganga pay obeisance to the sun god:

Om bhur bhuva swaha,
tat savitur varenium;
Bhargo devasya dhimahi,
dhiyo yo nah prachodayat

(Lord, we behold your light
that fills the three worlds;
And pray for your radiance to
illumine our minds)

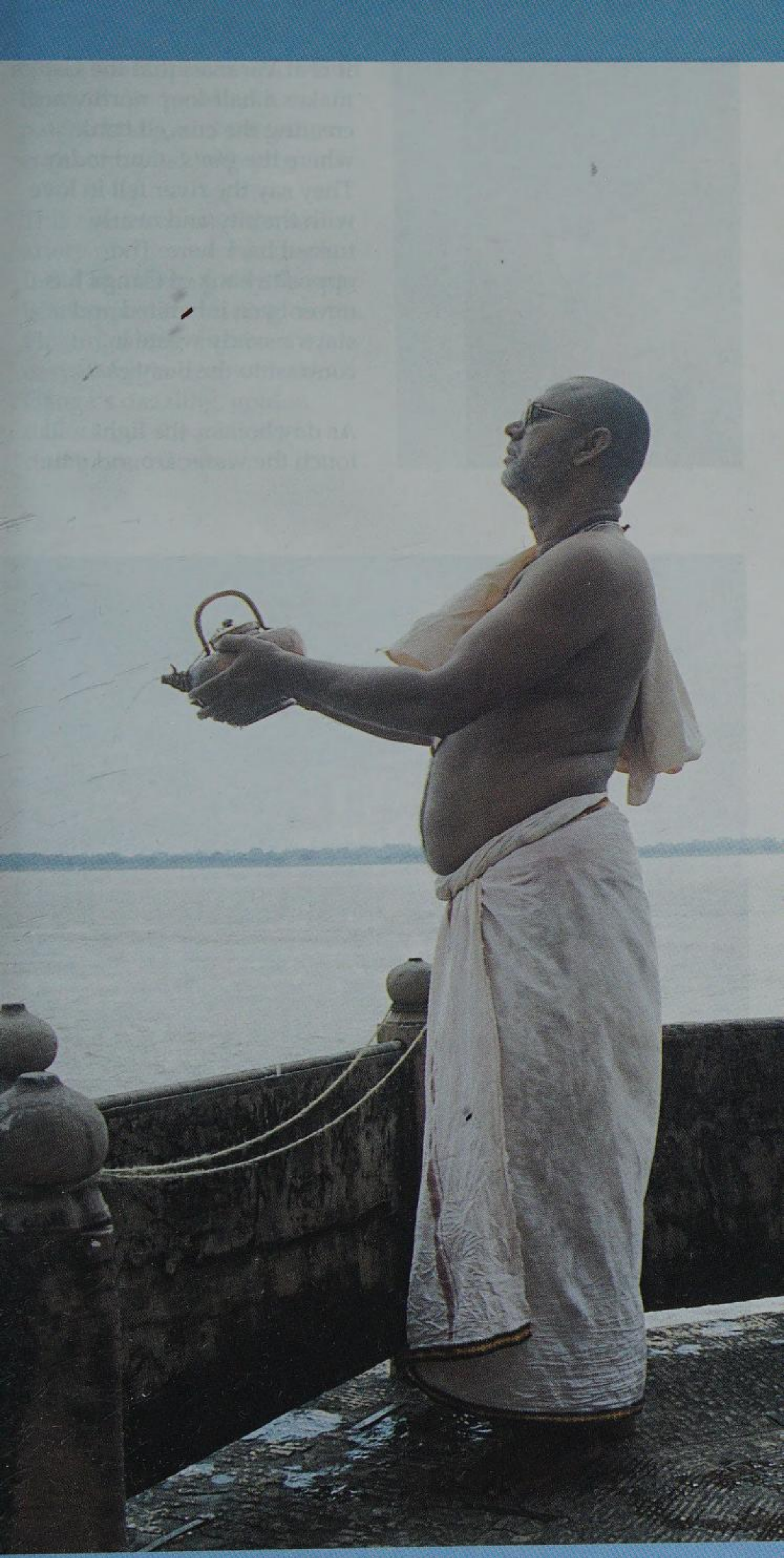
॥ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः तत्सवितुर वरेण्यम्
भर्गो देवस्य धी महिधियोयोनः प्रचोदयात् ॐ॥

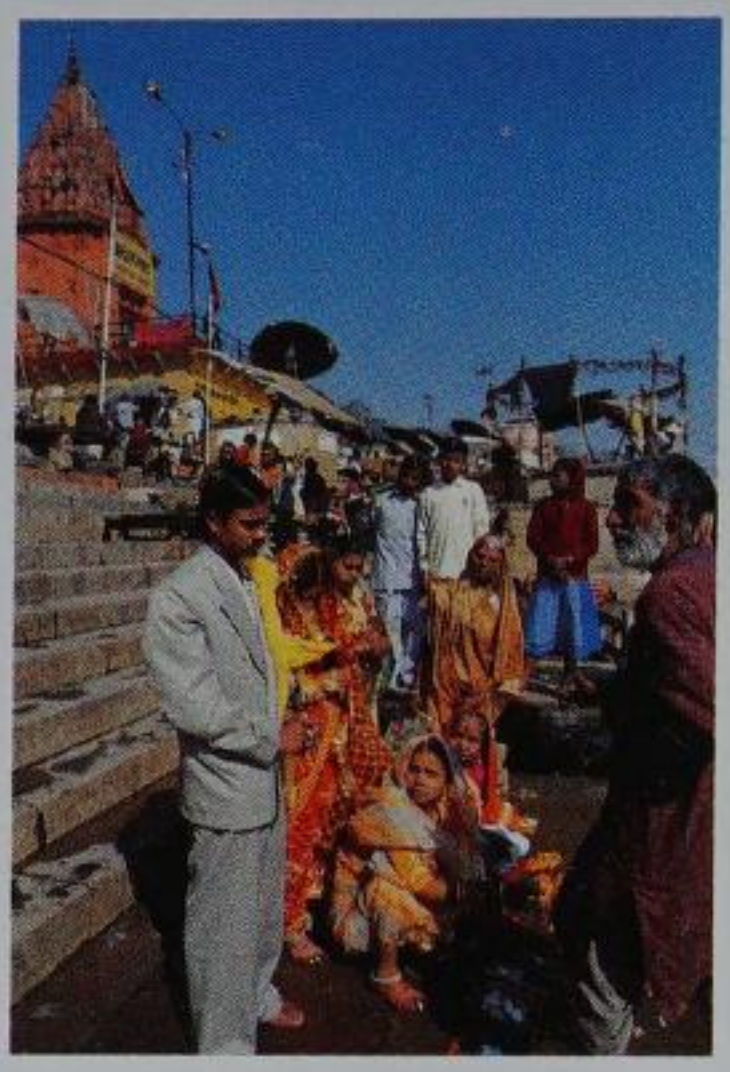


In Varanasi they paint the Ganga as a beautiful goddess, sitting languidly on a lotus while she is borne on the back of a crocodile. All three gods of the Hindu trinity claim her as their own. She travels in the brass pot carried by Brahma, she is one of Vishnu's consorts, and she is also one of the wives of Shiva.

Each drop of her holy waters has the power to purify the living and liberate the dead. Cremation by her banks and immersion of the ashes in her waters gives *moksha*, the ultimate salvation from the cycle of births and deaths.

Ganga is called Bhagirathi as she begins her journey, streaming out of a glacial cave at Gomukh beyond Gangotri. On her turbulent descent through the rock-strewn gorges of the Himalayas, she is fed by numerous little hill streams. At Devaprayag, she is joined by Alaknanda and she is thereafter formally called Ganga. Surging wider and deeper, she enters the plains at Haridwar and, some 2,500 kms later, her journey ends in the Bay of Bengal. Along the way, many rivers – the Yamuna, the Gomti and the Son – pour into her and by her banks stand ancient cities like Allahabad, Varanasi and Patna. She is *Samanayadhatri* – the Mother, Nourisher and Sustainer.



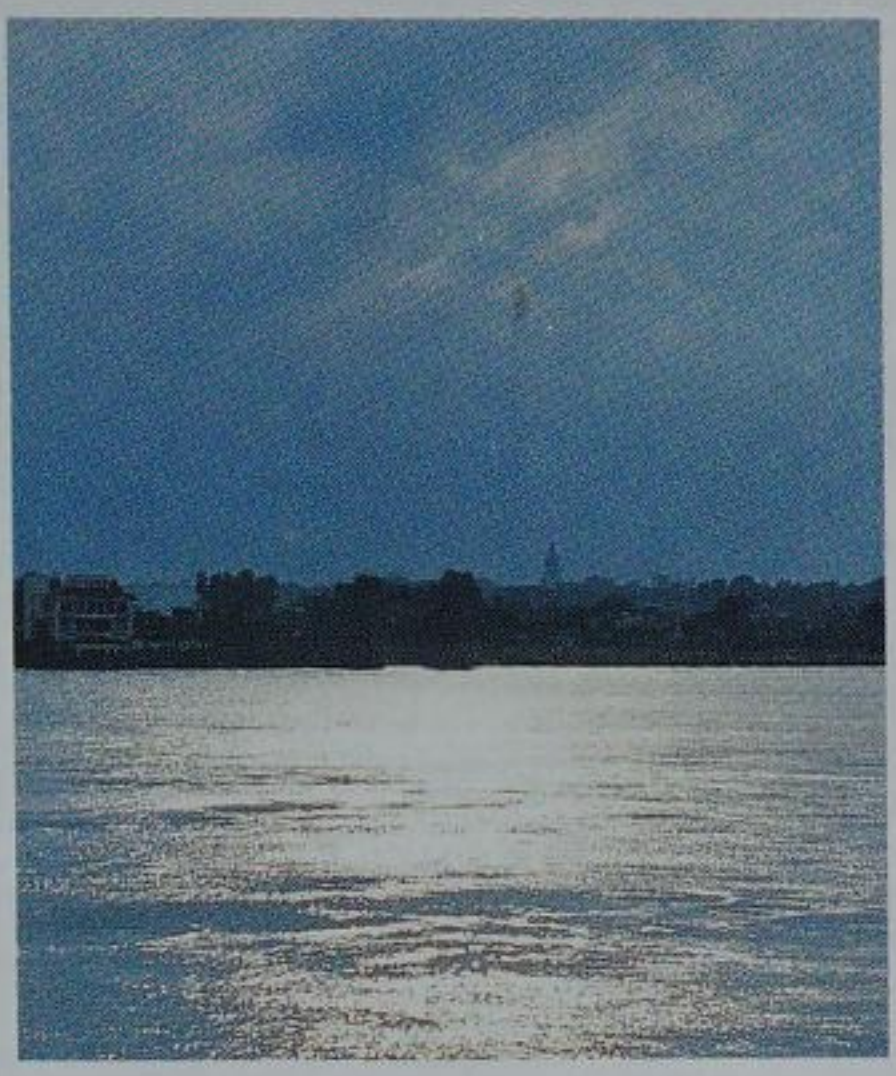


It is at Varanasi that the Ganga makes a half-loop northward, creating the curved bank where the *ghats* stand today. They say the river fell in love with the city and nearly turned back here. The opposite bank of Ganga has never been inhabited and stays a sandy waste in contrast to the busy *ghats*.

As day breaks, the light will touch the water around you.

Other boats appear – slow and heavy cargo boats with patched sails, and passenger crafts crowded with pilgrims.

This river was once the main artery of commerce in north India and, even today, the city is an important trading centre. Floating along the river, it is easy to fall in love with the Ganga's dazzling, golden dawns and the mellow, dull orange dusks.



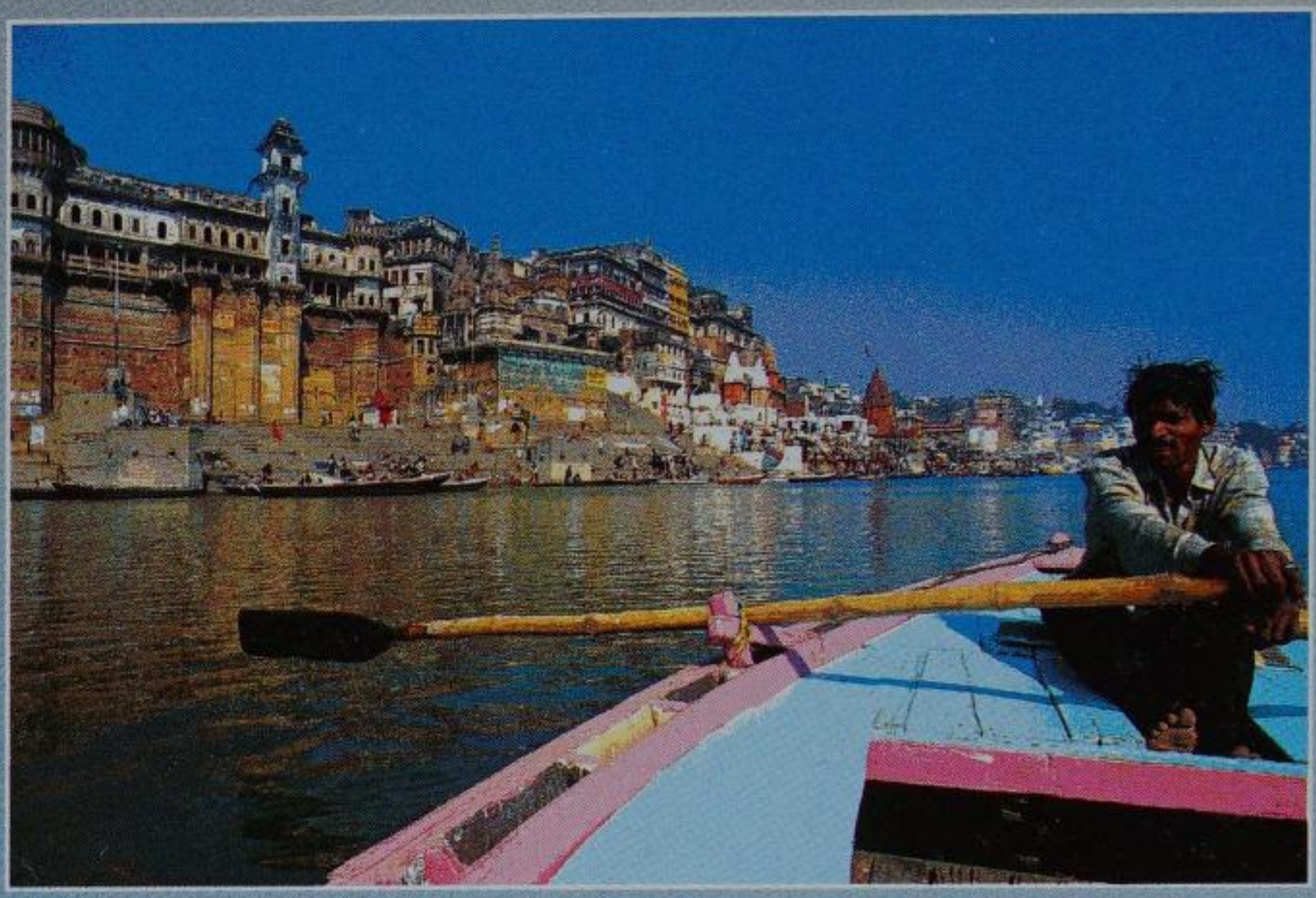
In the *Mahabharata*, Ganga is the daughter of Himalaya who gave birth to Bhishma, the grand patriarch of the two clans, the Kauravas and the Pandavas, that waged the legendary battle at Kurukshetra.

The *Mahabharata* says: 'The mere utterance of the Ganga redeems a sinner. The mere sight of the Ganga amounts to

a pious act. To bathe in it or to drink its waters leads to the salvation of seven generations and no sooner do the ashes of the dead touch the water, than the soul is transported to heaven.'

The river changes moods with the seasons. In winter, she is a calm expanse of aquamarine, reflecting the colours of a cloudless sky.

In summer, the Ganga shrinks to a narrow, turgid stream.



Fly then where Ganga on the King of Mountains
Falls like a flight of stairs from heaven let down
For the sons of men; she hurls her billowy fountains
Like hands to grasp the moon on Shiva's crown
And laughs her foamy laugh at Gauri's jealous frown.

– Kalidasa, *Meghdutam*

Then the rains come and the river is a raging goddess, a surge of muddy brown carrying everything before it. The waters rise, lapping ominously at the *ghat* steps and then the steps vanish under the waves.

At dusk, when the din of life slowly abates, perch on the steps of any *ghat* and watch shadowy figures float leaf boats carrying lighted clay lamps. As the fragile flames dip and rise with the waves, say a small prayer of thanks to the legendary King Bhagirath. After all it was his penance that brought this majestic river to earth.

The only way that the souls of Bhagirath's ancestors, King Sagara's sixty thousand sons, could be freed was if Ganga, the celestial river, descended to earth and washed away their ashes.

Though Sagara failed to persuade her, Ganga was forced to acknowledge the severe penance and prayers of Bhagirath. But she came to earth in a terrible torrent that would have destroyed all had Shiva not come to the rescue. He caught her in the coils of his hair till her rage abated, and then allowed her life-giving waters to pour gently down on the land.

Ganga Aarti

Every evening at five, a magical *aarti* is performed at Dasashwamedh Ghat. Halt your boat right at the steps for the best view. The presiding priests stand on a wooden *chauki* in the water.

To the chant of Sanskrit *mantras*, and the clash of cymbals and drums, the river is worshipped with flowers, incense, sandalwood, milk and vermilion.

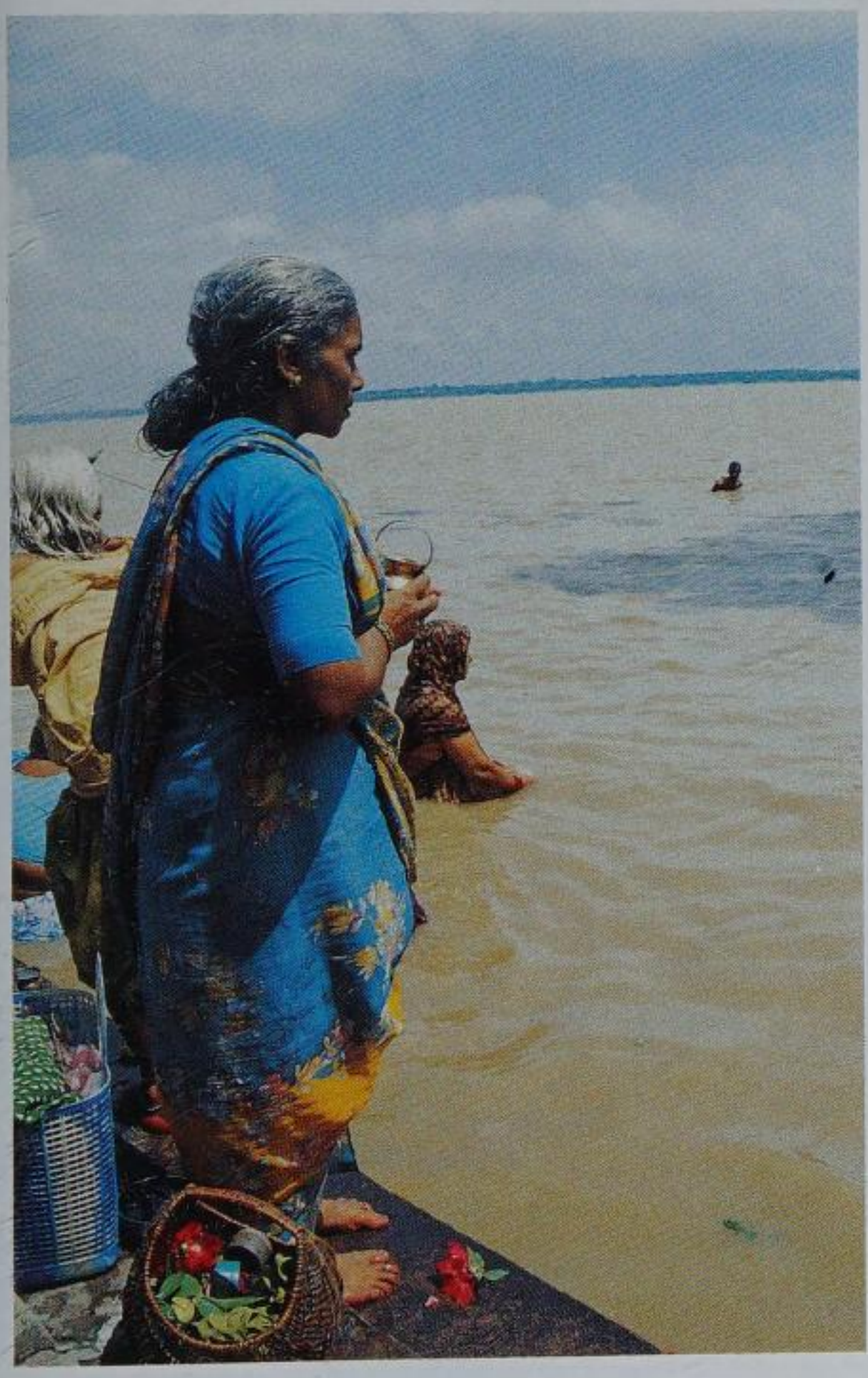
First the blazing camphor lamp and then the many-flamed *aarti* lamps are raised high and then arched back to the water, the dark river reflecting the golden flames as Ganga accepts the worship.

At Varanasi, the Ganga is a woman to be loved and spoilt, wooed and worshipped. So they have festivals in celebration of the river. In May, on *Ganga Saptami*, when the Ganga is said to have descended to earth, the tank at Manikarnika Ghat is decorated with a profusion of flowers and a vibrant fair springs up around it.

The following month sees *Ganga Dashahara*, the day when the Ganga entered the plains at Haridwar. In a joyous welcome, people decorate their beloved river by stringing marigold garlands and, like profligate lovers, trail them across her mighty waters.

In 17th century, the poet Jagannath composed *Ganga Lahari*, a beautiful paean to the river. Jagannath was ostracised by the Brahmin community when he fell in love with a Muslim woman at the court of the Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan.

The poet returned to Varanasi and begged to be accepted back into the Hindu fold, but was refused. In desperation, he turned to the river. The lovers sat on top of the fifty-two steps at Panchganga Ghat, and there he sang fifty-two verses in praise of Ganga. With every verse the river rose one step and, in the end, the forgiving, purifying Ganga swept the lovers away.



Hindus from every corner of India gather at the banks of the Ganga. For centuries the river has been the spiritual thread binding this diverse land together.

It is the Ganga that gives Varanasi its spiritual resonance. She is an integral element in the combination of Kashi-Ganga-Vishweshvarya, the holy city, the celestial river and the supreme god.

Swatchha Ganga Project

Veer Bhadra Mishra is the Mahant or spiritual head of the Sankat Mochan Temple, the second most important shrine in Varanasi after the Vishwanath Temple. He is a Sanskrit scholar, chanting the sacred *mantras* as smoothly as he breathes.

This quintessential Brahmin also headed the civil engineering department at the Banaras Hindu University. Above all, he is a passionate crusader for the environment, in love with a river he reveres as his 'mother'.

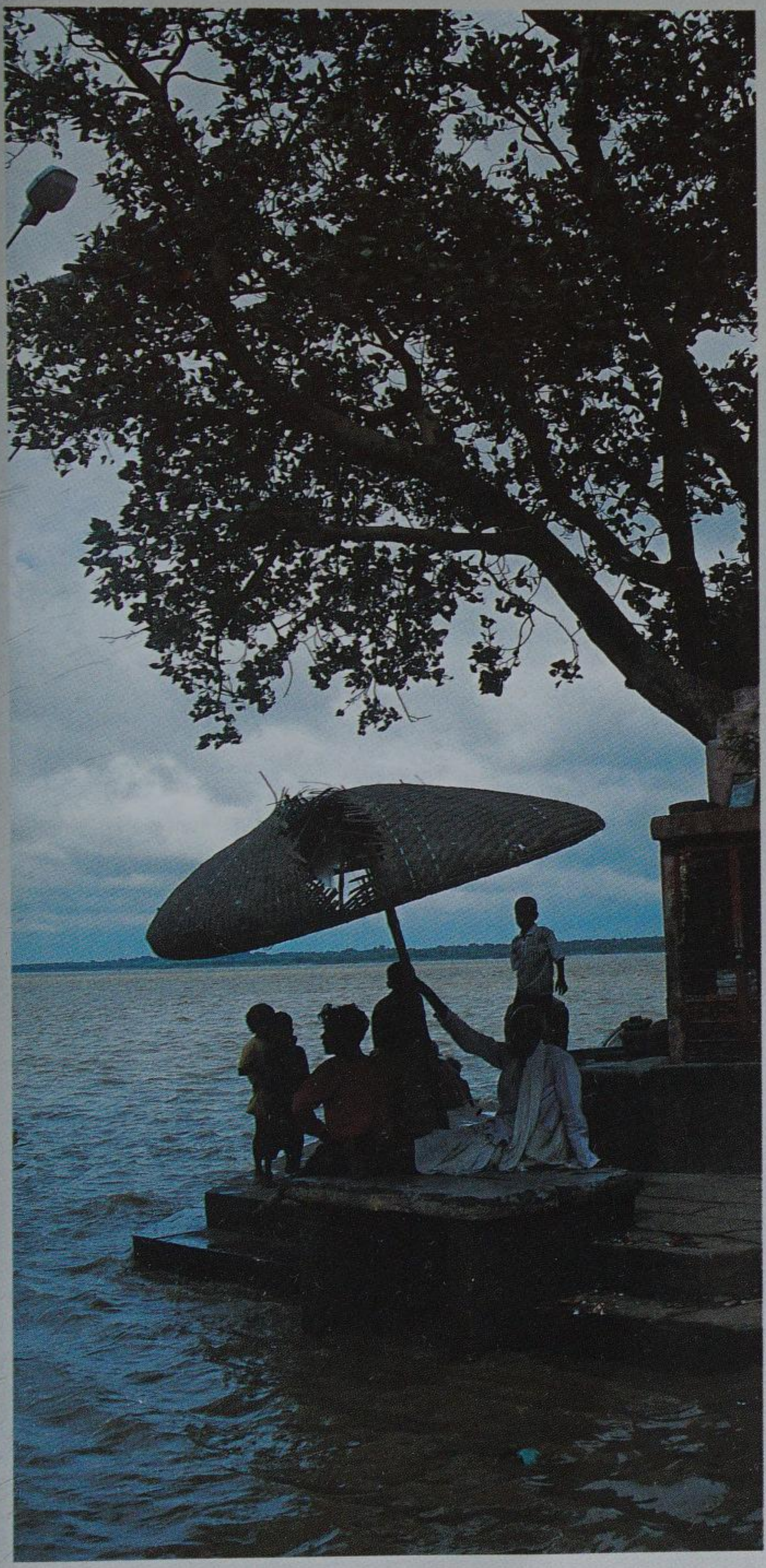
Veer Bhadra Mishra lives in a house above Tulsi Ghat, his life intimately tied to the river. 'My only desire,' he says, 'is to live beside Ganga*ji* for the rest of my life....offering my prayers to her every morning and seeking guidance, happiness.'

What upsets him is that the Ganga is becoming dangerously polluted. In 1986 the Indian government launched the Ganga Action Plan to cleanse the river. The clean-up is needed most at Varanasi, where an average 60,000 people bathe in the river every day. After every cremation on the *ghats*, the ashes are thrown into the river and the poor who cannot afford to buy firewood just float their corpses down the river. More critically, all the sewage and chemical waste of the city used to pour untreated into the river.

The government's efforts have not been fully successful. Mishra calls the people who live by the banks of the river 'an endangered species' and says, 'People ask if the river is so polluted, why aren't these people dying. Should we wait for people to die before doing something ?'

Veer Bhadra Mishra struggles constantly to raise public awareness about pollution and waste management. His efforts have been recognised by *Time* magazine with the title of 'Friend of the Earth'.

'Because I have scientific training, I know what is happening to the river, to my mother. I have dedicated myself to Swatchha Ganga Project. Being a religious and scientifically trained person I hold on to the river, to my faith, to my mother. She needs my help.'



Kashi

The City at the Centre of the Earth

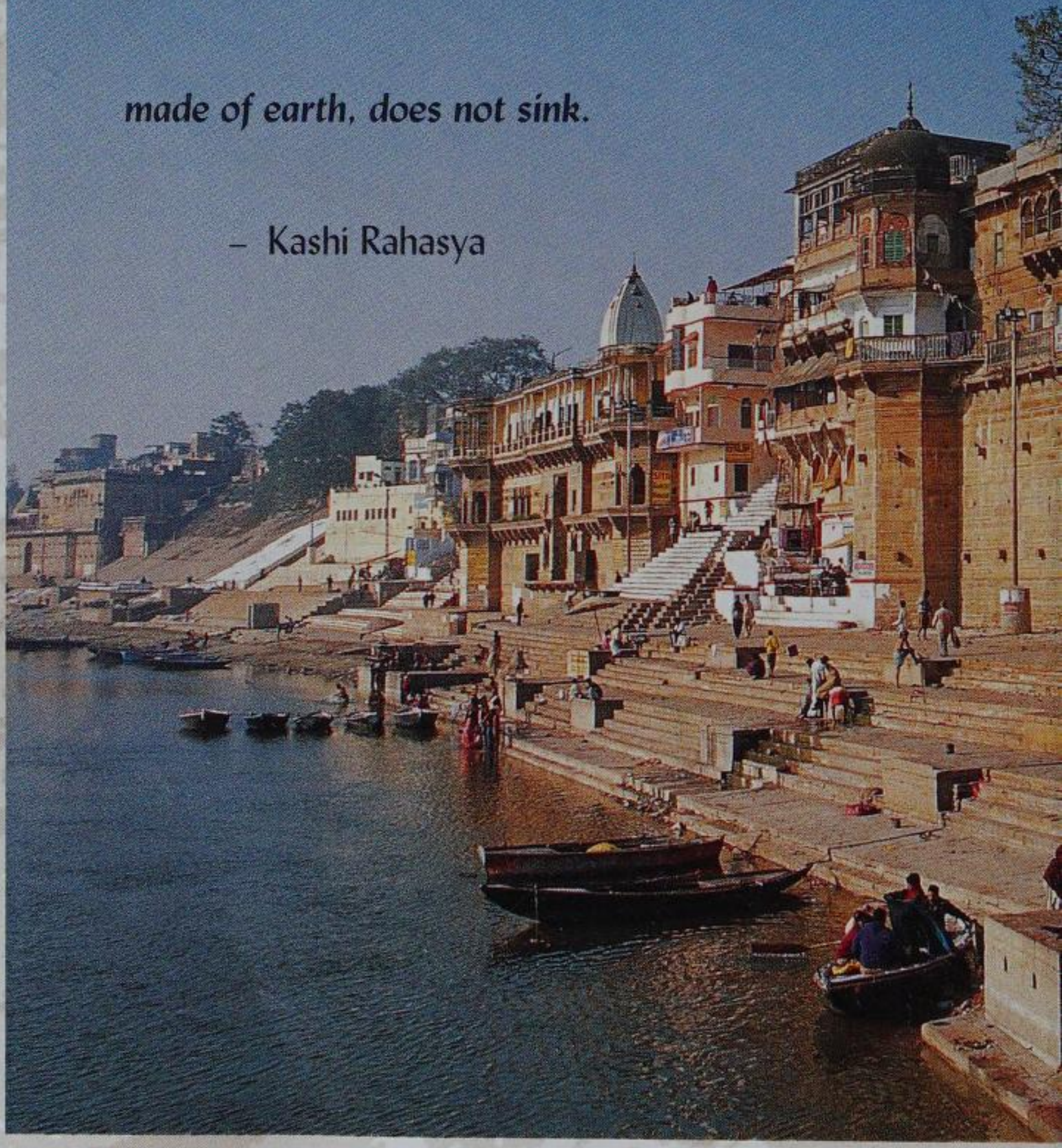
Just as the jewel is inlaid in gold,

so is Kashi in the earth.

Kashi, which was never created,

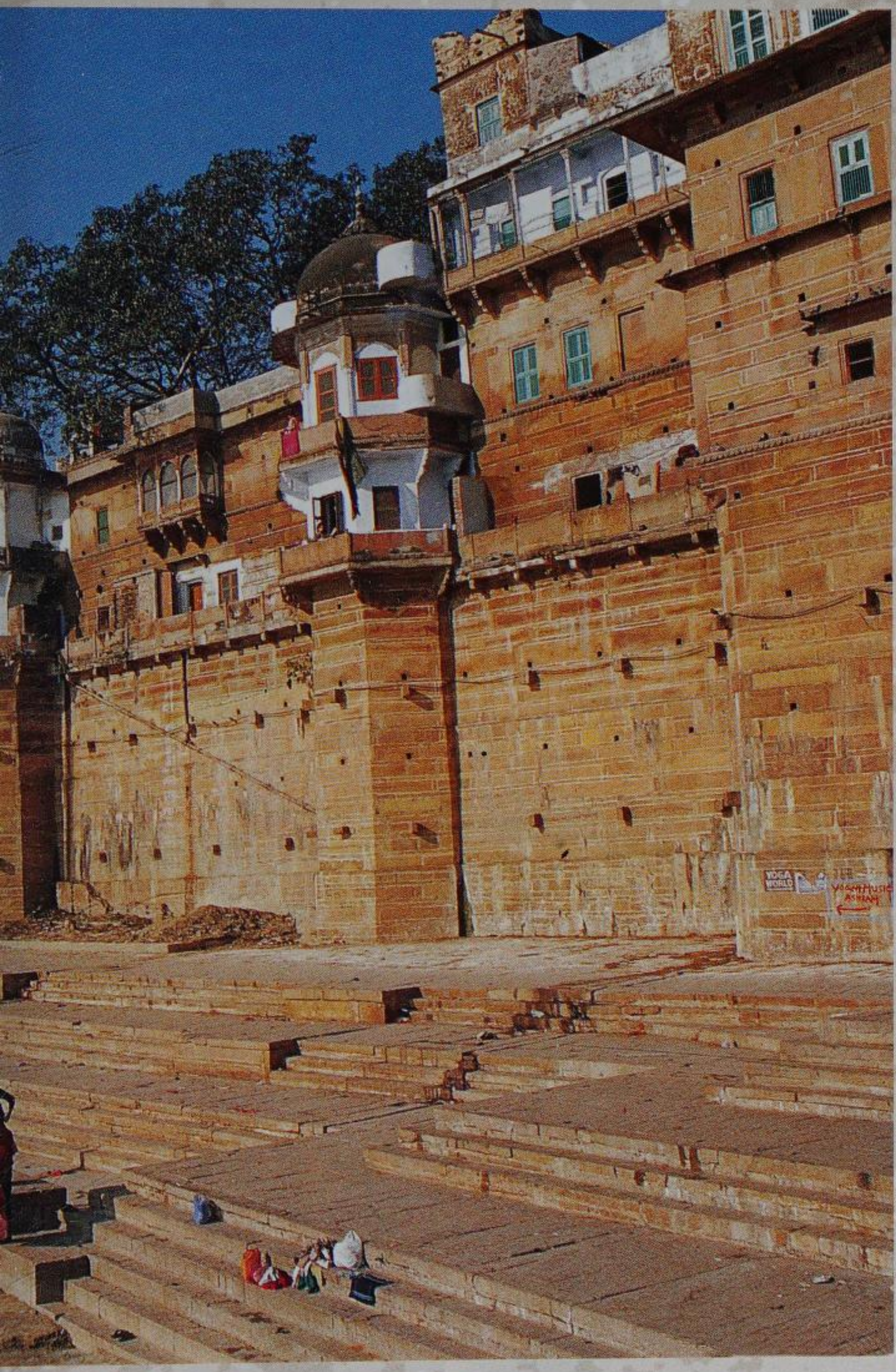
made of earth, does not sink.

– Kashi Rahasya



The ancient stones of Varanasi have seen many civilisations embrace ruin, watched the great cities of Nineveh, Babylon and Luxor vanish in the sands of time. As you walk through the dark, serpentine lanes of this city, you wonder what alchemy of spirit and circumstance has made this the oldest living city in the world.

Kashi. Benaras. Varanasi. It has all these names. It is where courtesans danced to the peal of temple bells and pilgrims came to pray for a good life, or waited serenely for a good death. Stand at the door of one of its many temples and watch the faces of the pilgrims. It will be a vibrant collage of the faces of India.



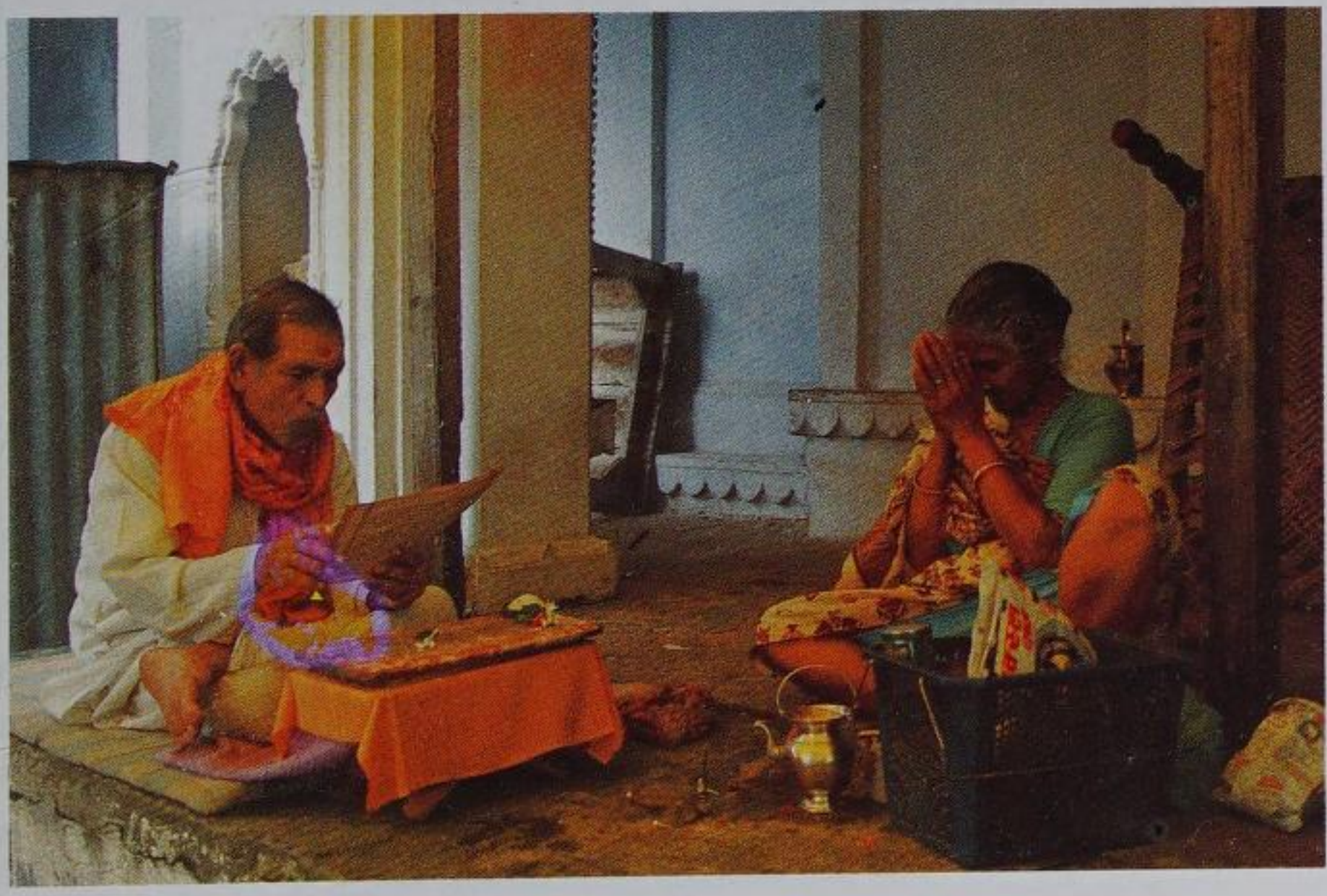
And you wonder what magical powers can draw a Marwari businessman, a Tamil scholar and a Bengali bureaucrat to stand together before a deity with their hands full of flowers.

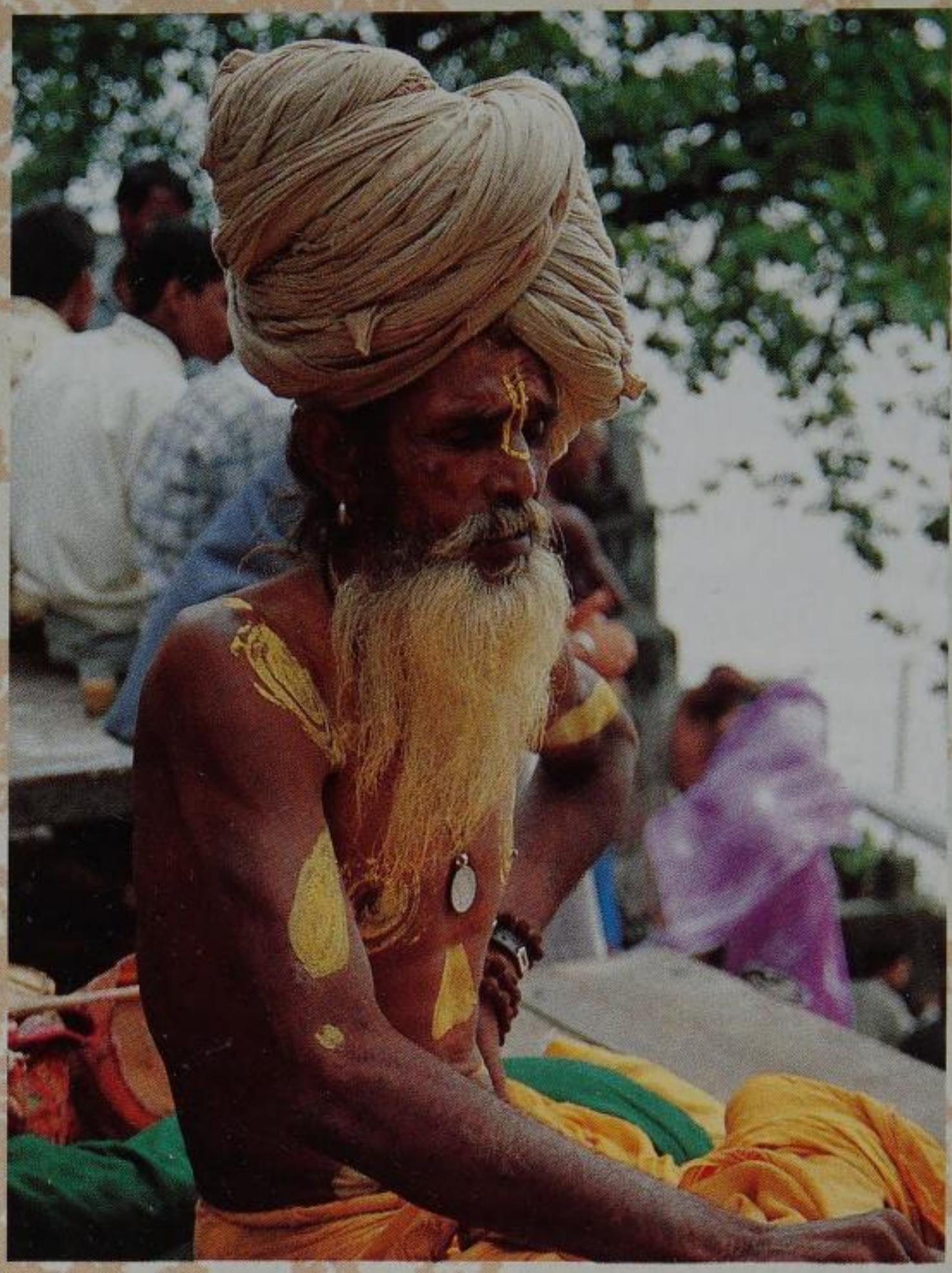
For a Hindu, a sacred place is a *tirtha* or a bridge across the river of *samsara*, that endless cycle of birth and death. A *tirtha* is a pilgrimage, a blessed place where our prayers are heard and sins forgiven. It is the threshold between heaven and earth, a place of such purity and power that even the most fallen of mortals can be cleansed.

You arrive at a *tirtha* with your *karma*, your life's record of deeds. You visit the temples hoping your good deeds will help carry your prayers to the gods. The burden of your sins you take to the river, where your prayers of penance are followed by a cleansing bath. Now you are ready to cross the celestial bridge to liberation.

"At a tirtha whatever is sacrificed, chanted, given in charity or suffered in penance, even in the smallest amount, yields endless fruit because of the power of that place."

– Narayan Bhatt,
Tristhalisetu, 16th century





Of the seven sacred Hindu *tirthas*, Kashi is the *tirtha* supreme. A pilgrimage to Kashi gives you the virtue of visiting all of them. Kashi is the most blessed of *tirthas* because it is graced not only by the presence of the volatile, compassionate Lord Shiva, but also by Ganga, the river that came down from heaven to free us from our sins.

As cities go, Varanasi is one of the most ancient. Kashi lived before many other cities were born. Archaeological excavations at Raj Ghat in north Varanasi have revealed a city wall and remnants of pottery and artefacts that date to 9th century BC. Raj Ghat is today a grassy plateau, but it was once the centre of the city, and for many hundreds of years continued to be the heart of Varanasi.

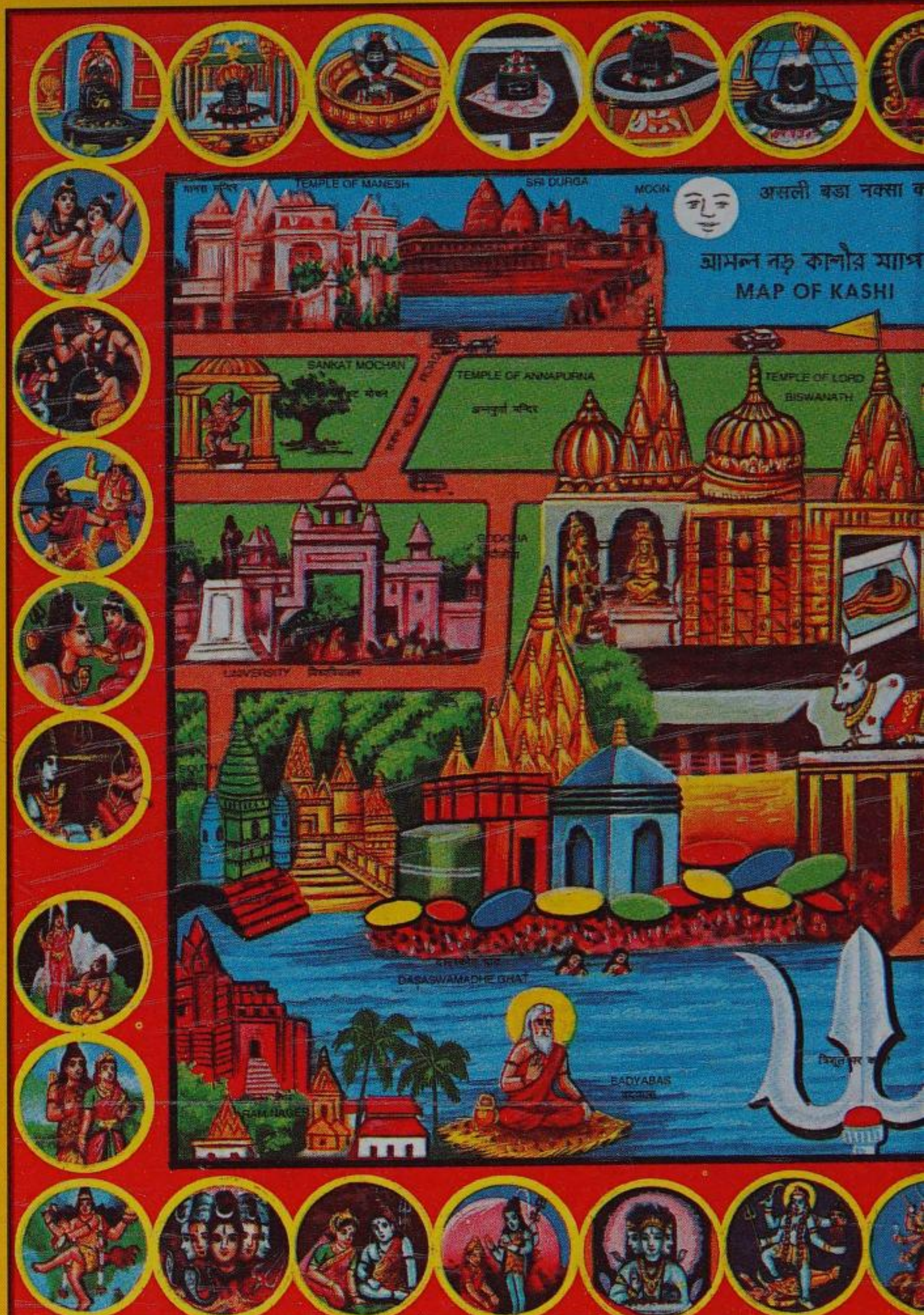
Kashi's recorded history goes back to the ancient epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, and later Sanskrit texts like the *Puranas*. The kingdom of Kashi is mentioned in *Mahabharata*, written sometime in the first millenium BC.

According to the epic, the powerful northern kingdoms that took part in the legendary battle of Kurukshetra included Kashi, Koshala and Magadha.

The city was the capital of the realm of Kashi and later, when Koshala conquered the kingdom, the king took the proud title *Baranasiggaho* – conqueror of Kashi.

Later, the city was said to be part of the dowry the Koshala princess brought with her when she married the emperor of Magadha, Bimbisara, a contemporary of Lord Buddha.

In the 6th century BC, the Buddha came to Varanasi after gaining enlightenment in Bodh Gaya. He preached his first sermon at the Deer Park in Sarnath on the outskirts of the city. The Buddhist *Jataka* tales mention 'Baranasi', coveted by kings, as it was the 'chief city in all India'. The *Jatakas* also describe the fabulous wealth of the Kashi traders, the *shreshtis*.



The city was called Kashi, or the Luminous One, also because of the light of learning that emanates from it.

Legend has it that long centuries ago, to the south of Raj Ghat was a forest at the confluence of five streams with the Ganga. In the forest there were *ashrams* that were centres of learning. These *ashrams* were presided over by *rishis* or learned sages who encouraged the development of new schools of thought.

Over the ages, seekers of truth, the Buddha, Mahavira, Adi Shankara and Nanak

came here to gain knowledge and participate in scholarly debate. Original thinkers like the grammarian Patanjali in the 2nd century BC and the 11th century theologian Ramanuja also worked here.

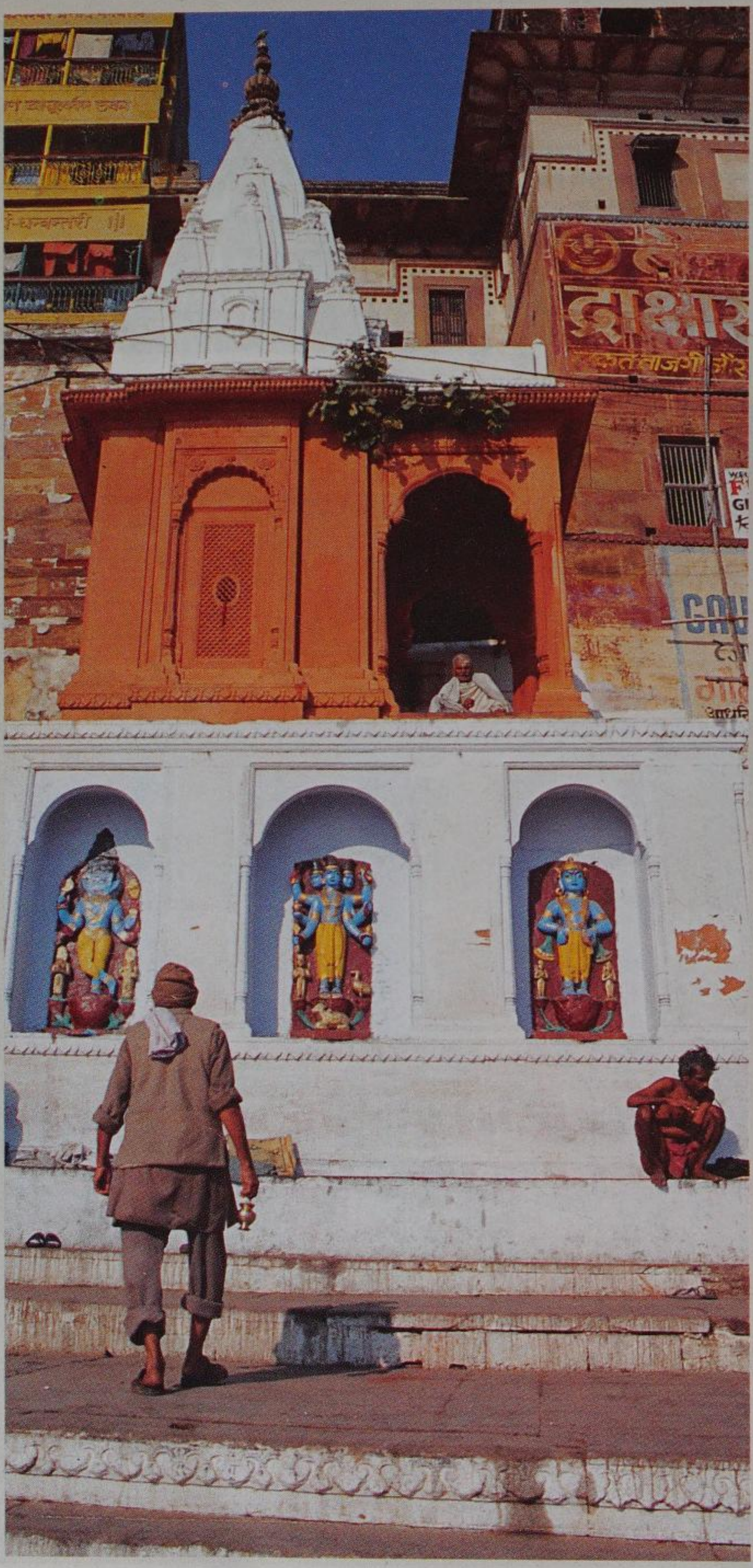
With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate in 1206, the entire Gangetic plain came under Islamic rule. The Muslims remained in power on the Indian subcontinent for over five hundred years. However, despite the religious persecution it faced, Kashi's scholarly tradition survived, kept alive by generations of Brahmin scholars.

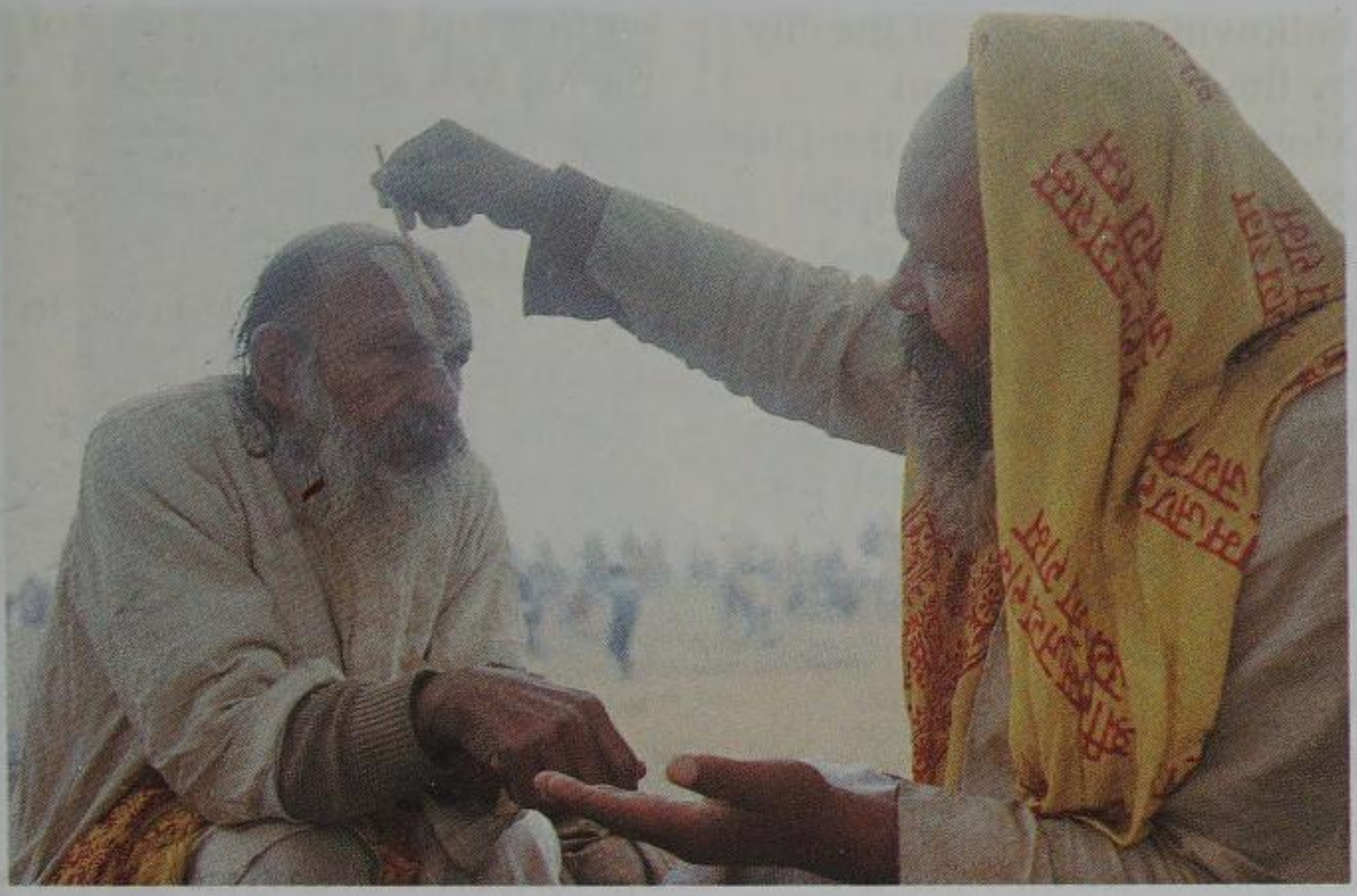
The tradition of scholarship has continued into the present times. In 1916, the rationalist leader and educationist Madan Mohan Malviya laid the foundation of the Banaras Hindu University (BHU), aiming for a synthesis of ancient Indian culture and modern science.

A few years later in 1921, the Kashi Vidyapeeth was established in the city with the encouragement of Mahatma Gandhi. Earlier, in 1791, the British colonial rulers paid tribute to the scholastic tradition of Varanasi by setting up the prestigious Sanskrit College.

Right:
Inside Banaras Hindu University campus

Below:
Row upon row of clay images of Saraswati, the goddess of learning





Songs of Kashi

In the ferment that followed the meeting of two religions, Hinduism and Islam, a new devotional stream of Hinduism rose. In many ways similar to Sufi thought, the Bhakti movement swayed to a passionate love of god and rebelled against rituals.

The saint Ramananda had untouchables among his disciples and the most famous was the weaver Kabir. Even today, people sing Kabir's wise and earthy songs. He ridiculed religions and rituals and defied priests. Kabir's formless god lived in the hearts of people, not in temples or mosques.

In the 16th century, the great Bhakti poet Tulsi Das wrote his immortal paean to Lord Rama, the *Ramcharitmanas*, while sitting by the steps of the Assi Ghat.

Tulsi Das was the first to render the *Ramayana* in the vernacular instead of the traditional Sanskrit, making it accessible to the common people. The folk theatre of Ram Leela that flourishes even today is based on this verse epic.

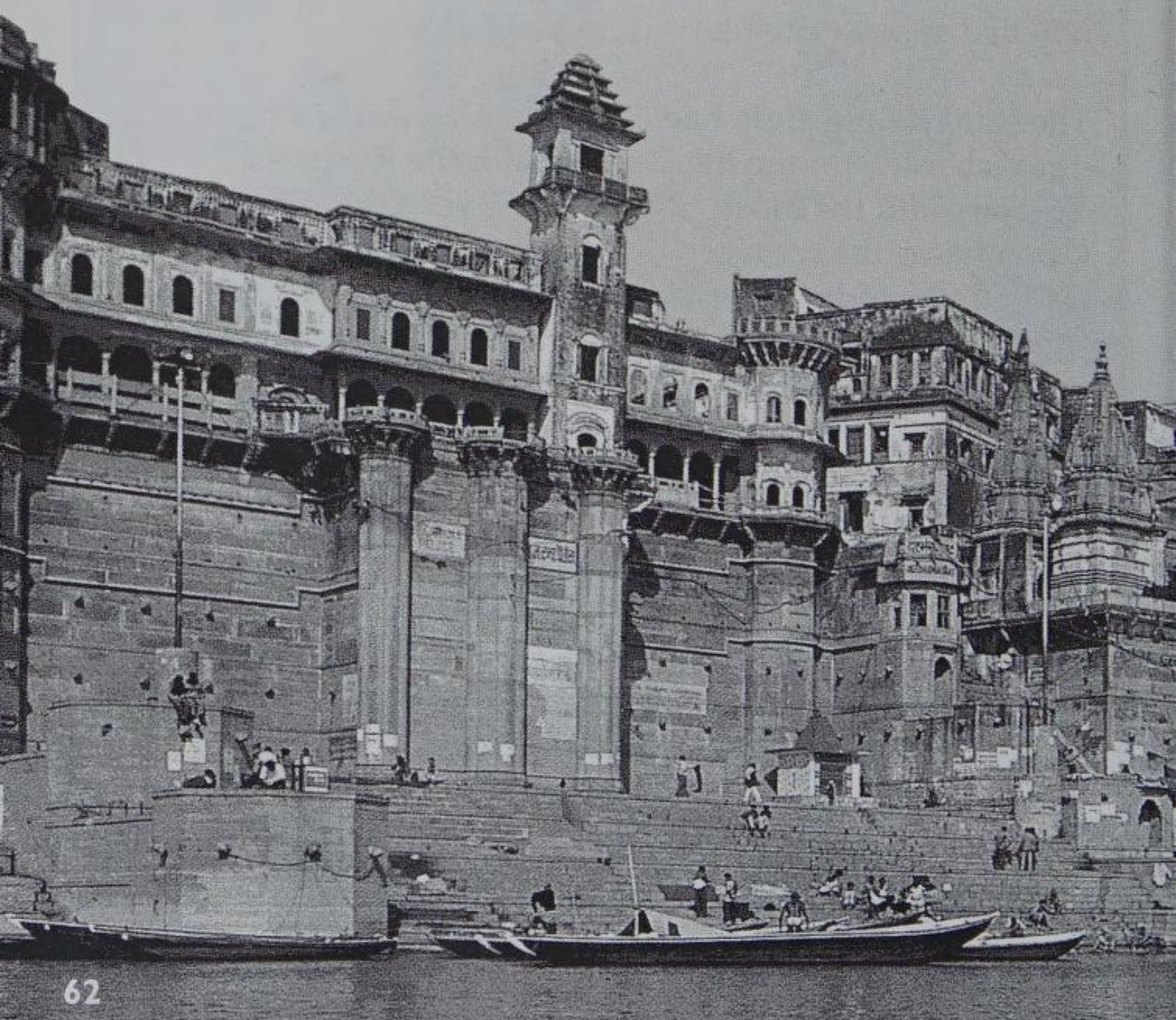
For Kabir the mind is Mathura
And the face is Kashi
The body is the gate to the Brahman,
Where the light can be seen.

– Kabir

Following the sack of the city by the forces of Sultan Mohammad Ghuri in the 13th century, Varanasi's temples were destroyed again and again. The only respite came in the 16th century, during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, when his general, the Raja of Amber, built many magnificent temples and *ghats* on the banks of the Ganga. But with Aurangzeb, the city faced unprecedented bigotry and all that remained of the temples of Kashi were the names – Omkareshwara, Madhyameshwara, Bindumadhava.

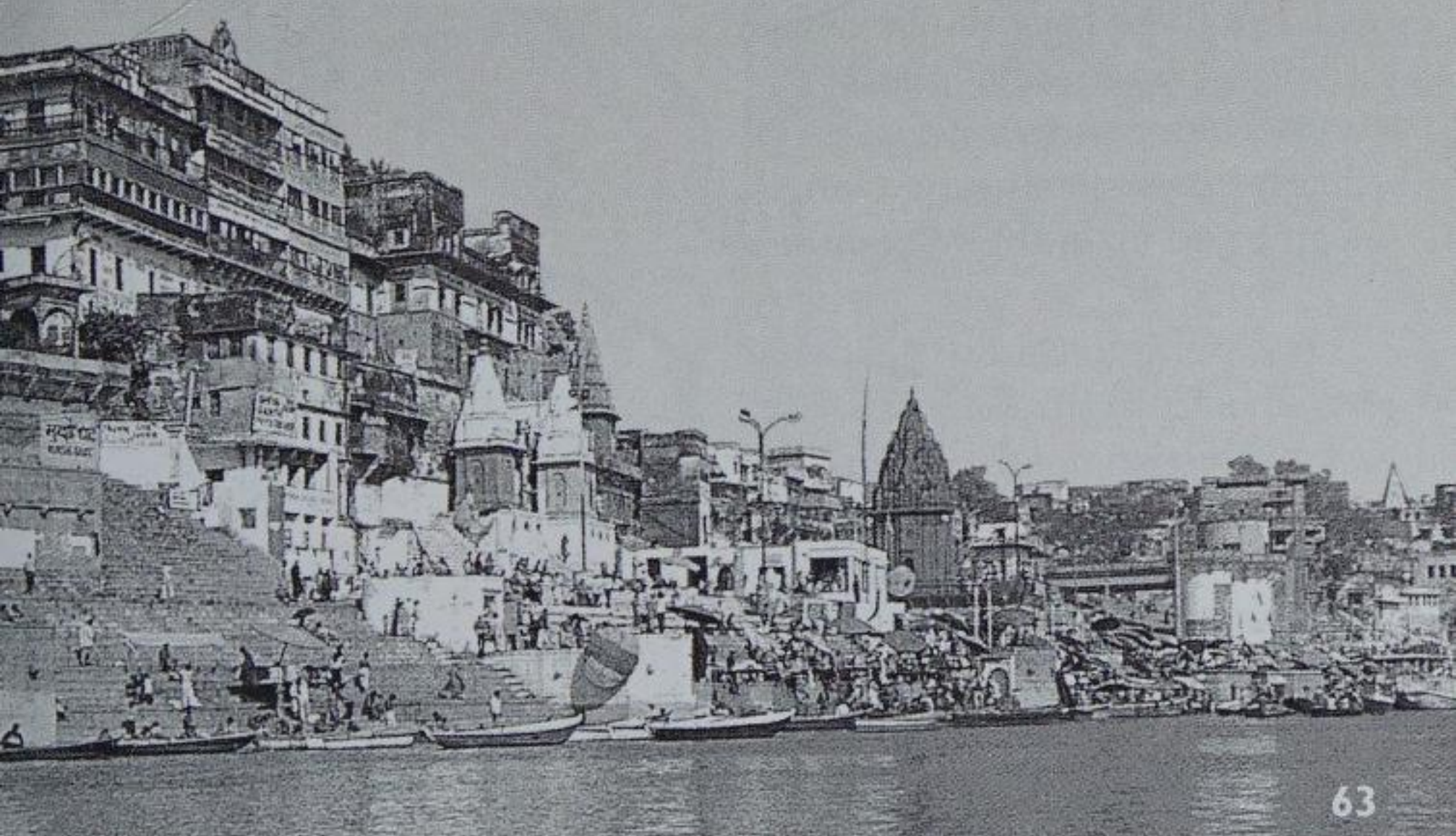
After each round of destruction, resilient Varanasi rose again. With the slow disintegration of the Mughal empire and the ascendance of the Marathas, the temples were rebuilt and the *ghats* repaired. In the 18th century, the Maratha chieftain, Sadashiv Rao Peshwa came to live here, and the thousand Brahmins who accompanied him, helped revive Sanskrit scholarship.

Today, Varanasi does not exhibit its holiness or wisdom, yet it is there for those who seek it. Outwardly, it is just an old city, crowded, chaotic and rather dirty. The ancient buildings seem on the edge of collapse; the traffic is a maddening din of cars, buses and rickshaws; there is squalor and poverty on the streets; and beggars crowd the door of every temple.



Not only is Benaras remarkable for her venerable age, but also for her vitality and her vigour which, so far as we know, she has always exhibited. While many cities and nations have fallen into decay and perished, her sun has never gone down; on the contrary, for long ages past it has shone with almost meridian splendour. ...As a queen she has ever received the willing homage of her subjects scattered all over India;as lover she has secured their affection and regard.

– M A Sherring, Benaras: The Sacred City of the Hindus(1868)



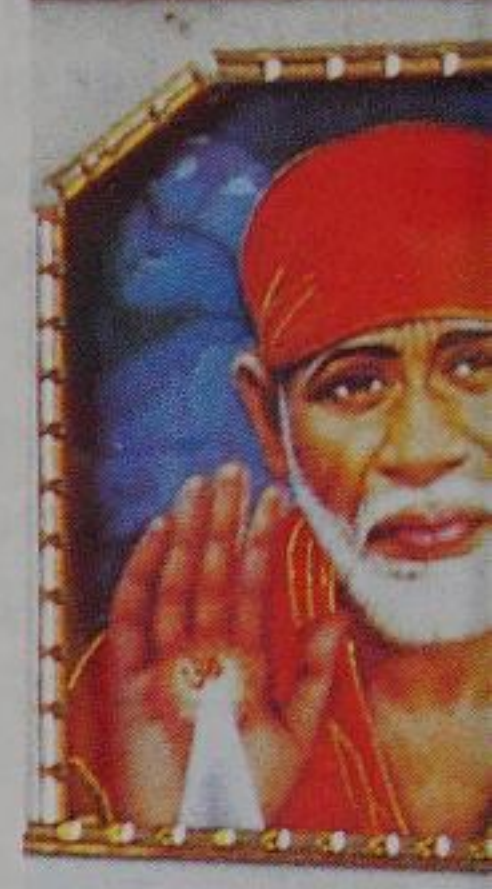
Varanasi is also known as the Mahashmashana or the Great Cremation Ground, and death is a constant, palpable presence in this city. The vivid fires of the cremation *ghats* burn by the riverside, bodies are constantly carried through the streets, the hospices for the dying echo to the chant of *mantras*. But to touch the core of Varanasi, you have to move beyond these outward images.

Shiva's city of *kama* or love embraces life's every pleasure. Even during the Buddha's time, Kashi's courtesans were legendary for their beauty and avariciousness. Kashi has always been tolerant of life's many vices.

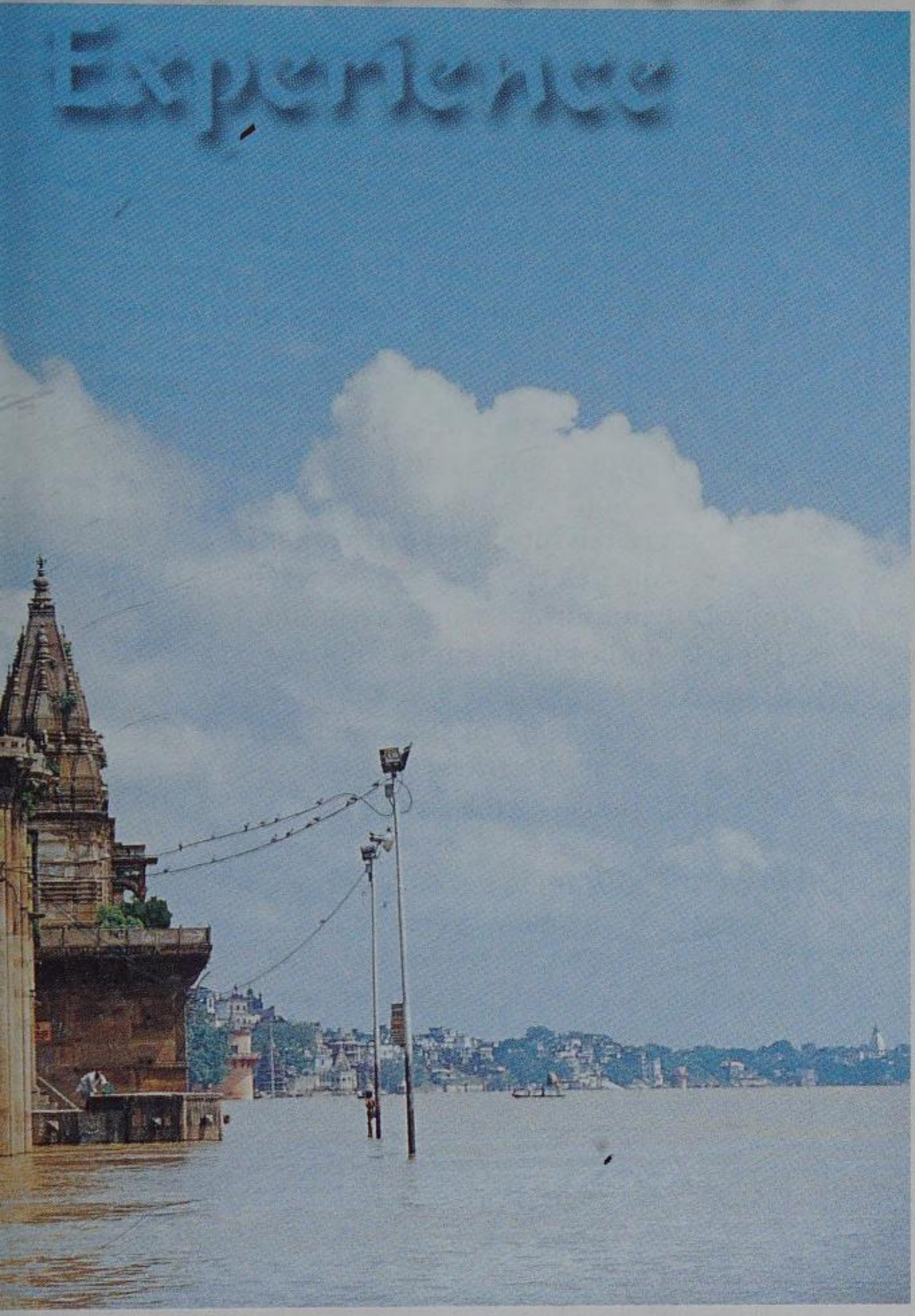
The people of Varanasi are proud of their love of *mauj-masti*, a reckless spirit of fun. They love music, dance, food and conversation, enjoy wrestling in the *akharas* and the carnival of festivals. They defiantly face life by putting kohl in their eyes, stuffing *paan* into their cheeks and venturing out with a gallant swagger.

A visitor is often amazed at Kashi's blasé acceptance of death. You renounce the world here, and wait for death, serenely sipping Ganga water and listening to *mantras*.

The experience of Kashi spans the spectrum from *masti* to *mrityu*, joy to death. Open the windows of your mind to its elusive, ephemeral magic and let Kashi speak to you.



The Varanasi Experience



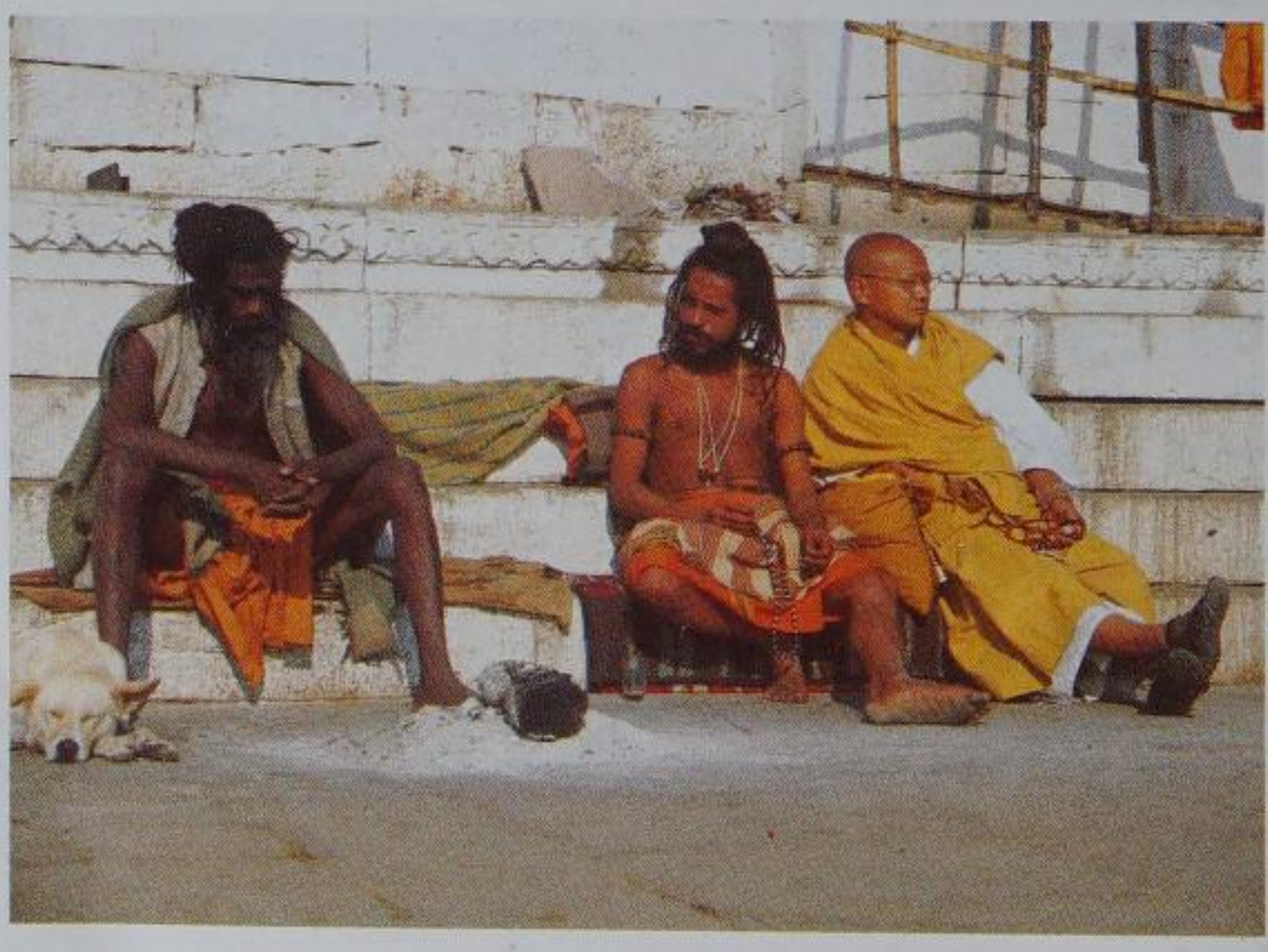
- Ghats
- Temples
- Galis & Mohallas
- Ramnagar
- Sarnath

Ghats

For five long kilometres along the western bank of the Ganga stretches a cityscape of temple *shikharas*, mansions, gateways and the tall minarets of the Alamgir Mosque. And endless stone steps sweep imperiously down to the water's edge. These steps are the legendary *ghats* of Varanasi.

The *ghats*, literally landings or banks, reflect centuries of building work undertaken by the rich and powerful of the land – monarchs and generals, saints and traders. Architectural extravagance on this scale in a city that was never politically important arouses wonder. The answer lies in the unique holy power of the river at Varanasi. You gain immeasurable *punya* or spiritual merit by building a temple here or merely by living in a house by the river of heaven.

The *ghats* have often been rebuilt over the years; many have been renamed; and some have been divided into smaller bathing spaces. Every year the monsoon floods rise to the top of the steps and leave behind a layer of silt.

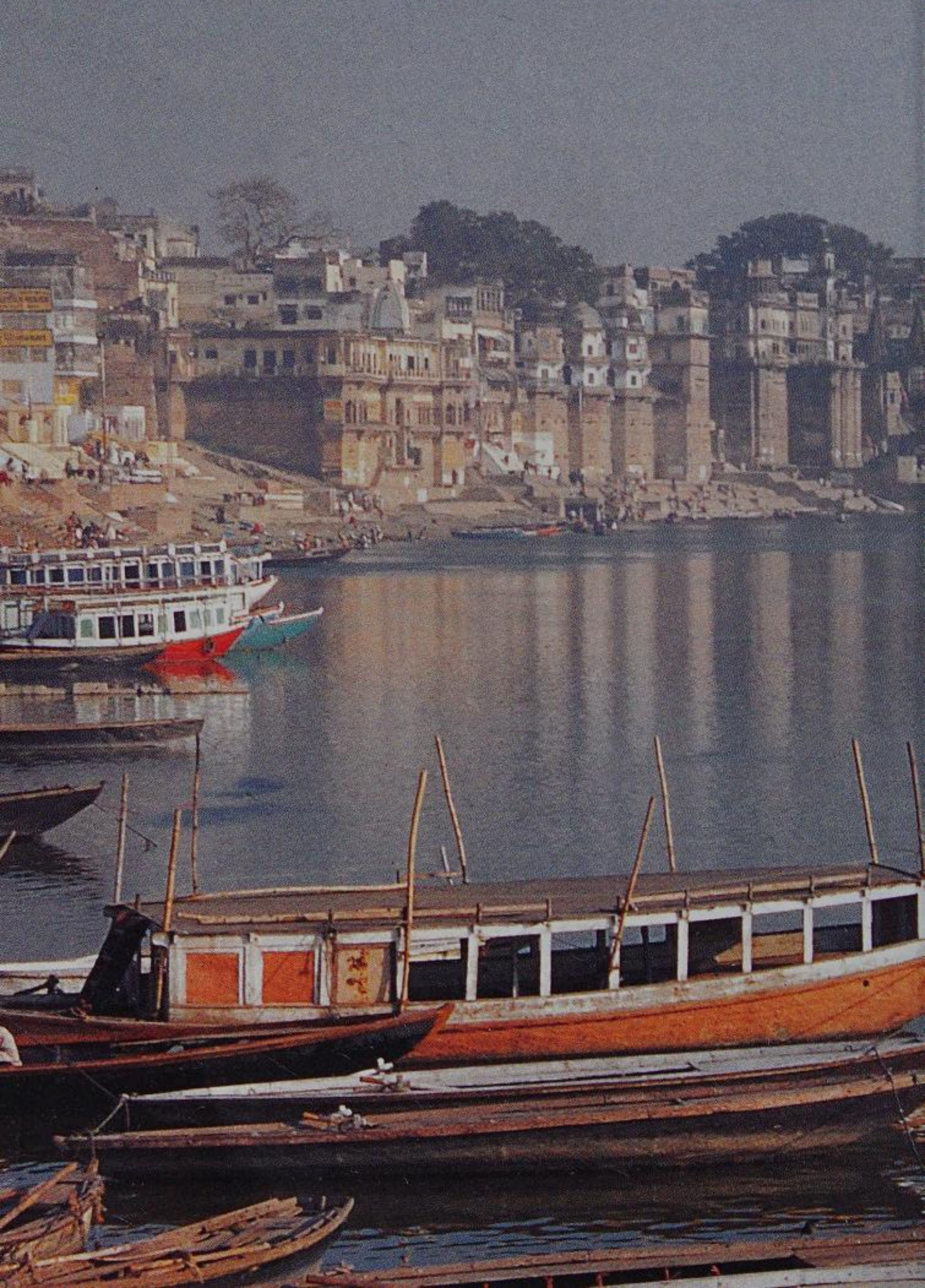


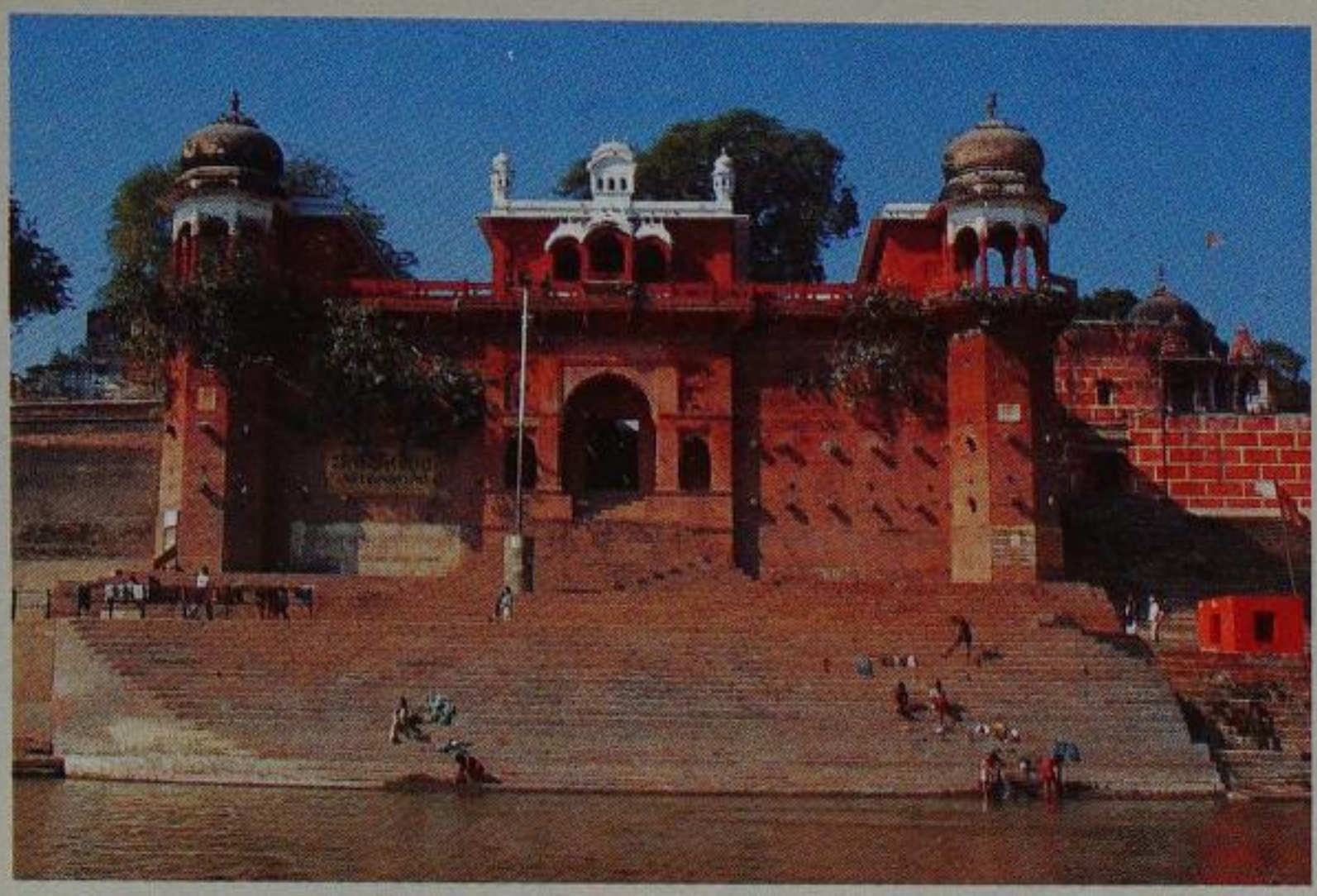
WELCOME for HOMELY COMFORT
FRIEND'S
GUEST HOUSE
友達の宿
VISIT To

DM ONCE VISIT
GAUTAM SILK FACTORY

And almost every *ghat* has a story to it – stories of mysterious *sadhus* who meditated underwater for thousands of years or of temples that the Goddess Ganga did not like and so washed away.

Hire a boat from any of the important *ghats* like Assi or Dasashwamedh and travel down the river. Turn to look at the *ghats* moving past like the images of a hand-operated bioscope – row after row of stone steps teeming with life. On one side of the river, Varanasi looks like a three-dimensional photograph pasted against the sky, while the other bank looks bereft, with empty stretches of sand and wasteland as far as the eye can see.

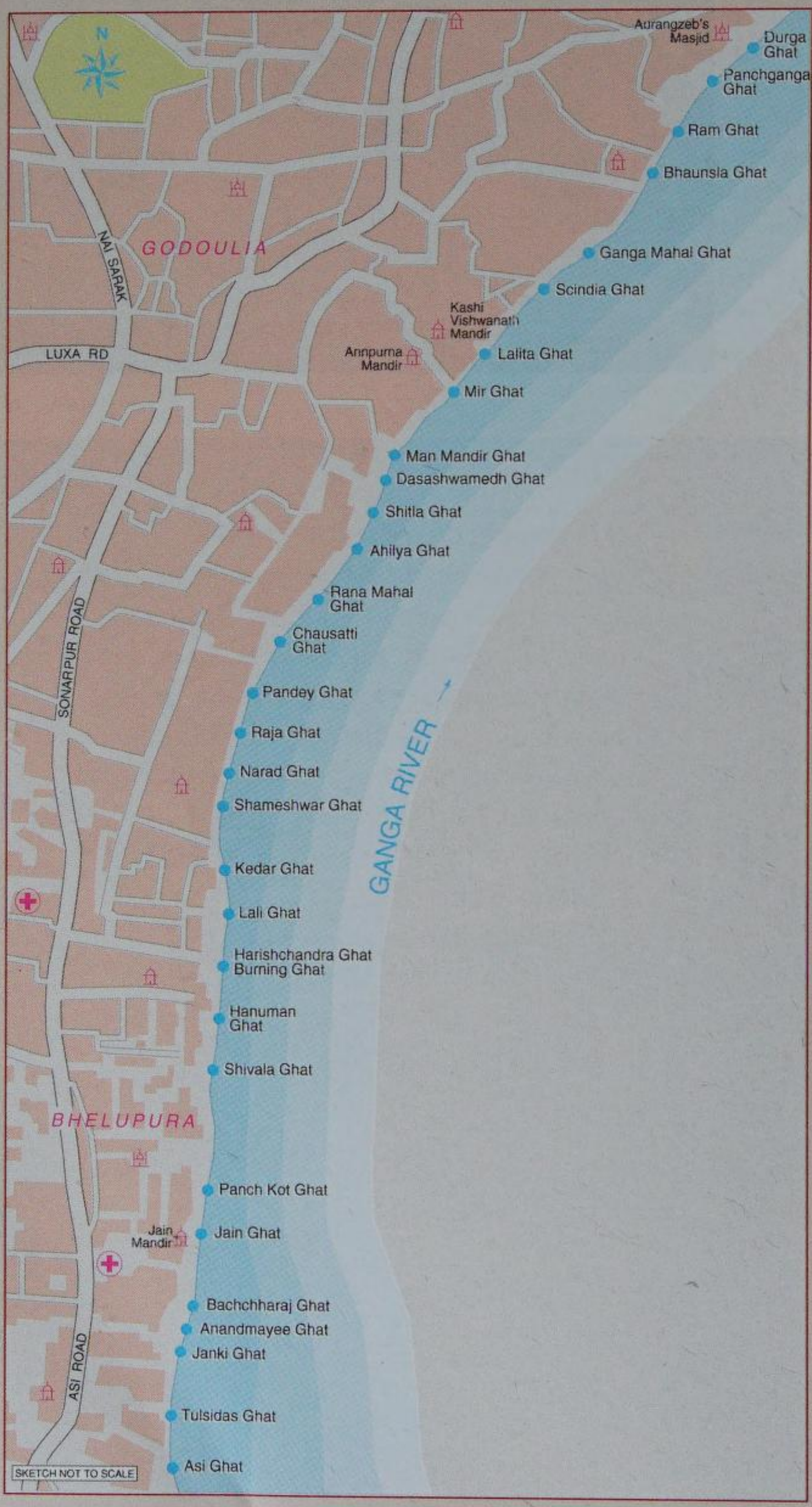




It is compactly walled from sight by this crammed perspective of platforms, soaring stairways, sculptured temples, majestic palaces, softening away into the distance; and there is movement, motion, human life everywhere and brilliantly costumed, streaming in rainbows up and down the lofty stairways....

– Mark Twain,
Following the Equator, 1896

Ghats of Varanasi



AMIT

I feel nearer here than I have ever done to the heart of the world; here I feel everyday as if soon, perhaps today I will receive the grace of supreme revelation.... The atmosphere of devotion which hangs about the river is improbable in its strength, stronger than in any churches that I have ever visited.

– Herman K eyserling
Indian Travel Diary of a Philosopher, 1918

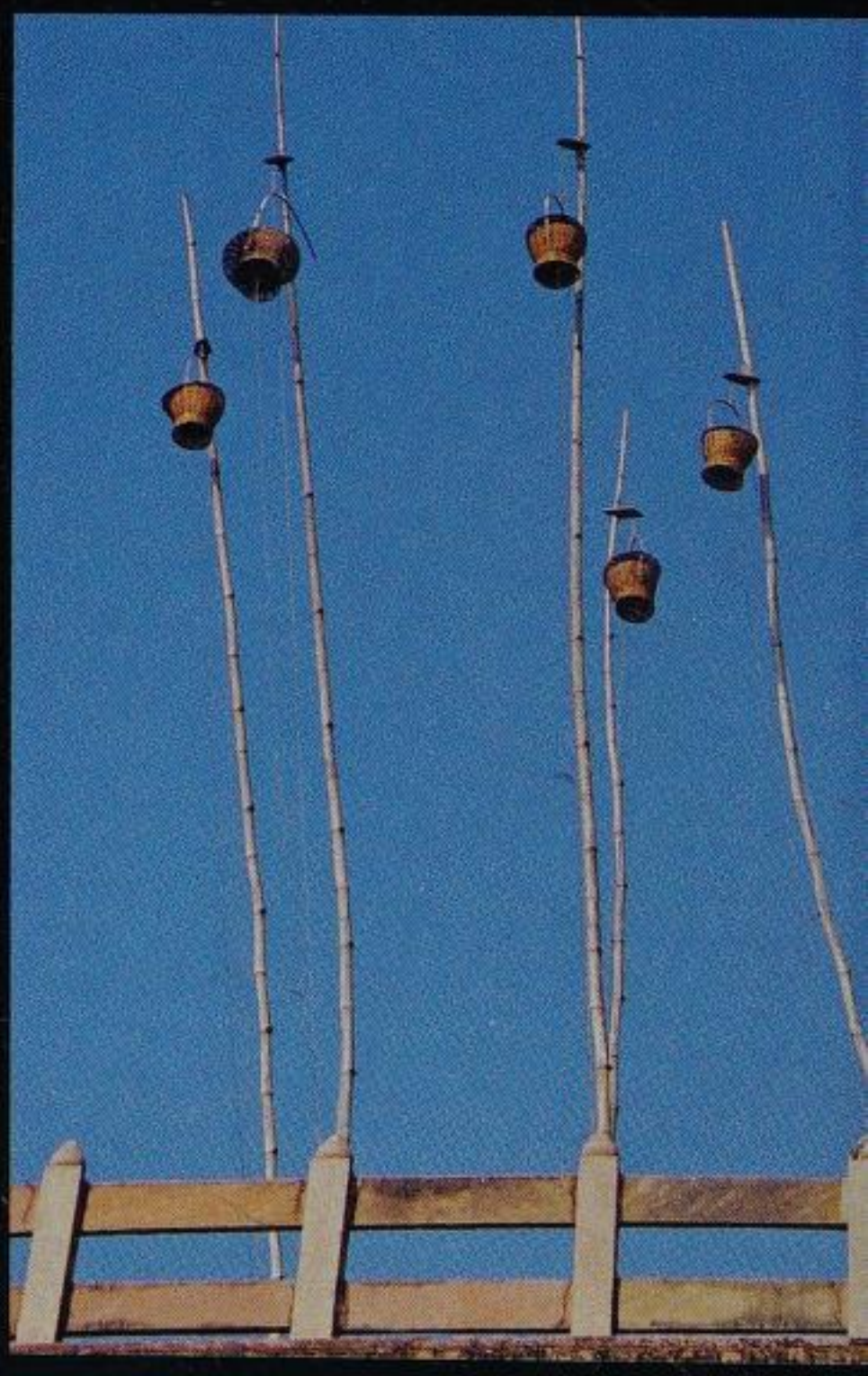
Some steps will be crowded with bathing pilgrims, other *ghats* will have long-haired *sadhus* sitting cross-legged and meditating or washermen beating clothes on the stone steps in an impromptu dance of raised arms. Then, as the boat floats on, the next *ghat* may have a group of wrestlers busy with vigorous exercises.

Sit on the *ghats* and watch life go by. From dawn, the bathers stream down the steps carrying brass pots and flowers. The first bath is considered the most auspicious. You will see all of India here – Rajasthani villagers in huge turbans, *dhoti*-clad Tamilians, their foreheads smeared with sandalwood paste, ebullient Bengalis and taciturn Jats. Families escorting a newly-wed couple, sombre groups clustered around a priest conducting funeral rites and little boys yelling in protest at their first hair cut. This extraordinary city has bound together a diverse land with the threads of faith.

The Last Refuge

All through the winter month of Kartik (mid-October to mid-November), as dusk gathers itself into night, crowds of women in white come to Panchganga Ghat carrying little *diyas*. They place the lighted earthenware lamps in baskets tied to tall bamboo poles and raise them to the skies. They are widows, come to light their husbands' paths to heaven.

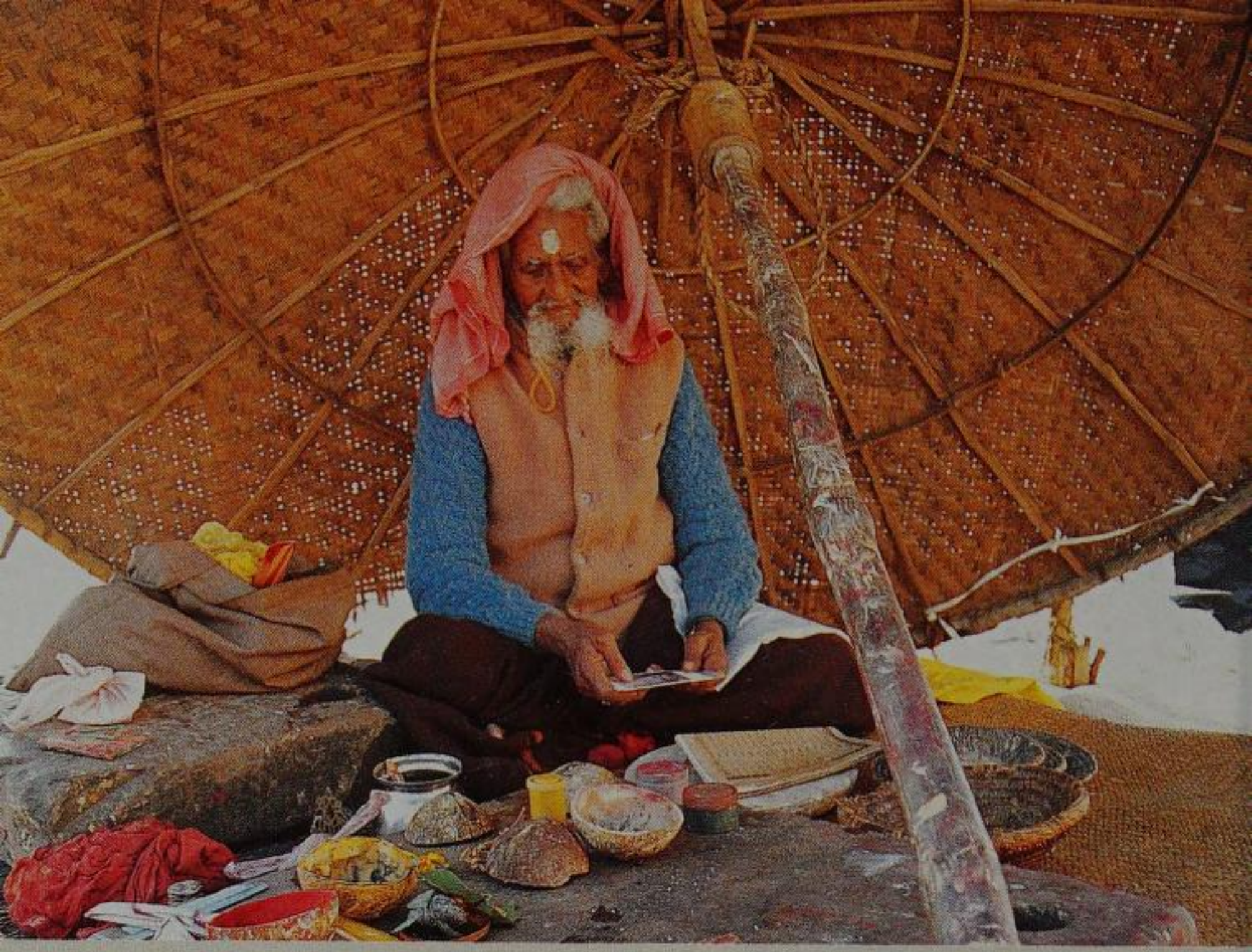
Kashi has always been the last refuge of the forsaken. And when a widow finds



herself forsaken by her husband and the world, she turns for sanctuary to Avimukta or the City Never Forsaken by Shiva. As the relic of her dead husband she has little role or relevance in her *grihasthi* or household anymore and forsakes domesticity for piety. And where better to eke out the rest of her existence than on the blessed streets of Kashi?

You see them everywhere in Kashi, these women in thin, white saris with their heads shaven in symbolic renunciation of the world. They live in the many *vidhwa ashrams* or widows' homes set up by the charitable to provide the hapless women a home away from home and to earn *punya* for the benefactor. Although these *ashrams* were originally well-endowed, most have today degenerated into ill-kept poorhouses.

As for the widows, you can find them all along the *ghats* and in the *galis* leading to the temples. You see them with begging bowls in their hands, waiting for the ultimate release, *mukti* from the mortal coil.

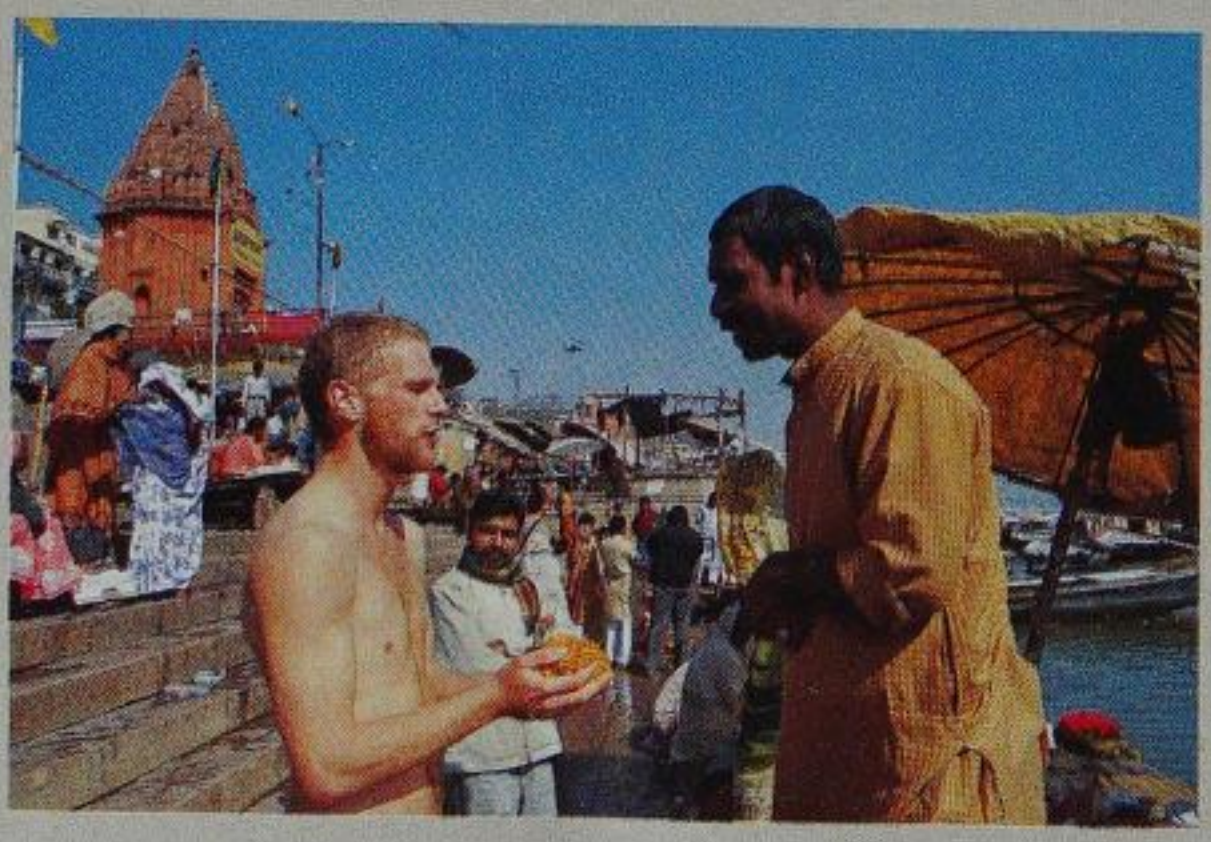


The priests at the *ghats* are called *ghatias* and they have ancestral rights to perform rituals here. Hindu rituals are rendered particularly sacred if performed at the *ghats* of Varanasi. A newborn is named at the *namkaran* ceremony and a boy gets his head shaved at the *mundan*. Newly-weds throw garlands into the river. But the ones performed most frequently are the rites for the dead – *shraadh* and *pindadaan*.

The religious bathing area stretches from Assi Ghat to Raj Ghat. However, over the centuries, some *ghats* have gathered greater significance and the most meritorious *ghats* are Assi, Kedar, Dasashwamedh, Manikarnika and Panchganga.

It is estimated that on an average sixty thousand people bathe in the Ganga at Varanasi every day and a large proportion of them will come to these five *ghats*.

Assi Ghat is off the Sonarpur Road that goes from Godaulia to Benaras Hindu University. Situated at the confluence of the Ganga and Assi rivers, it is an unpaved *ghat*.

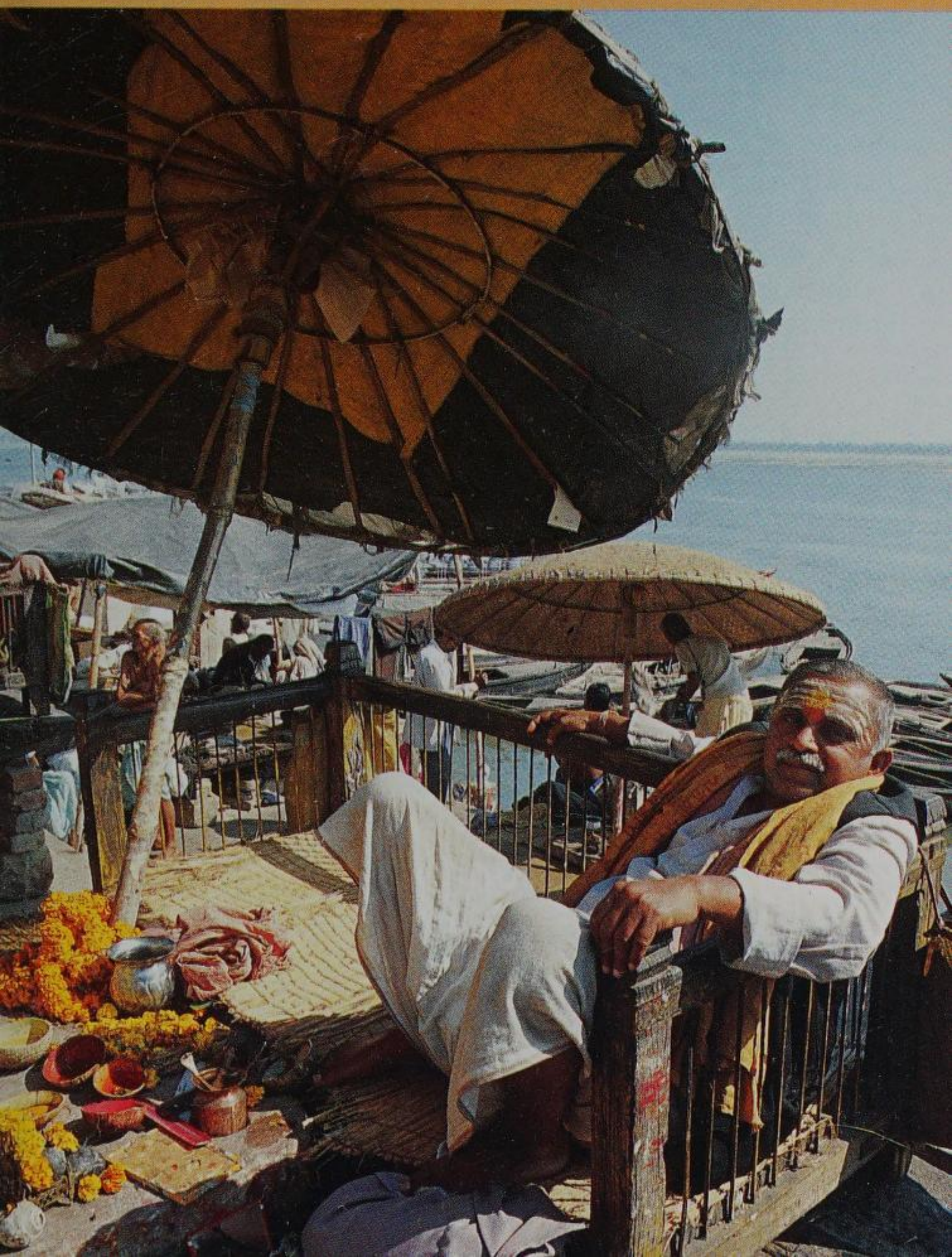


Assi river, which once marked the southern boundary of Kashi, has degenerated into a turgid stream. They say Assi sprang from this point when the warrior goddess Durga dropped her sword or *asi* while battling demons.

Assi Ghat is a recommended point to begin boat rides down the river. The Tulsi Manas and Durga temples are nearby.

In the 16th century, the poet Tulsi Das wrote his immortal epic *Ramcharitmanas* in a house just above Assi Ghat. A part of the *ghat* was later named **Tulsi Ghat** after the poet and his house and temple still stand here.

Just north of this *ghat* is one of the most sacred sites of Varanasi, Lolarka Kund, a pool dedicated to Surya, the sun god. It is said that the sun trembled at this site after admiring the beauty of Kashi. Childless women come here to bathe and pray for offspring during a popular annual festival in August/September.



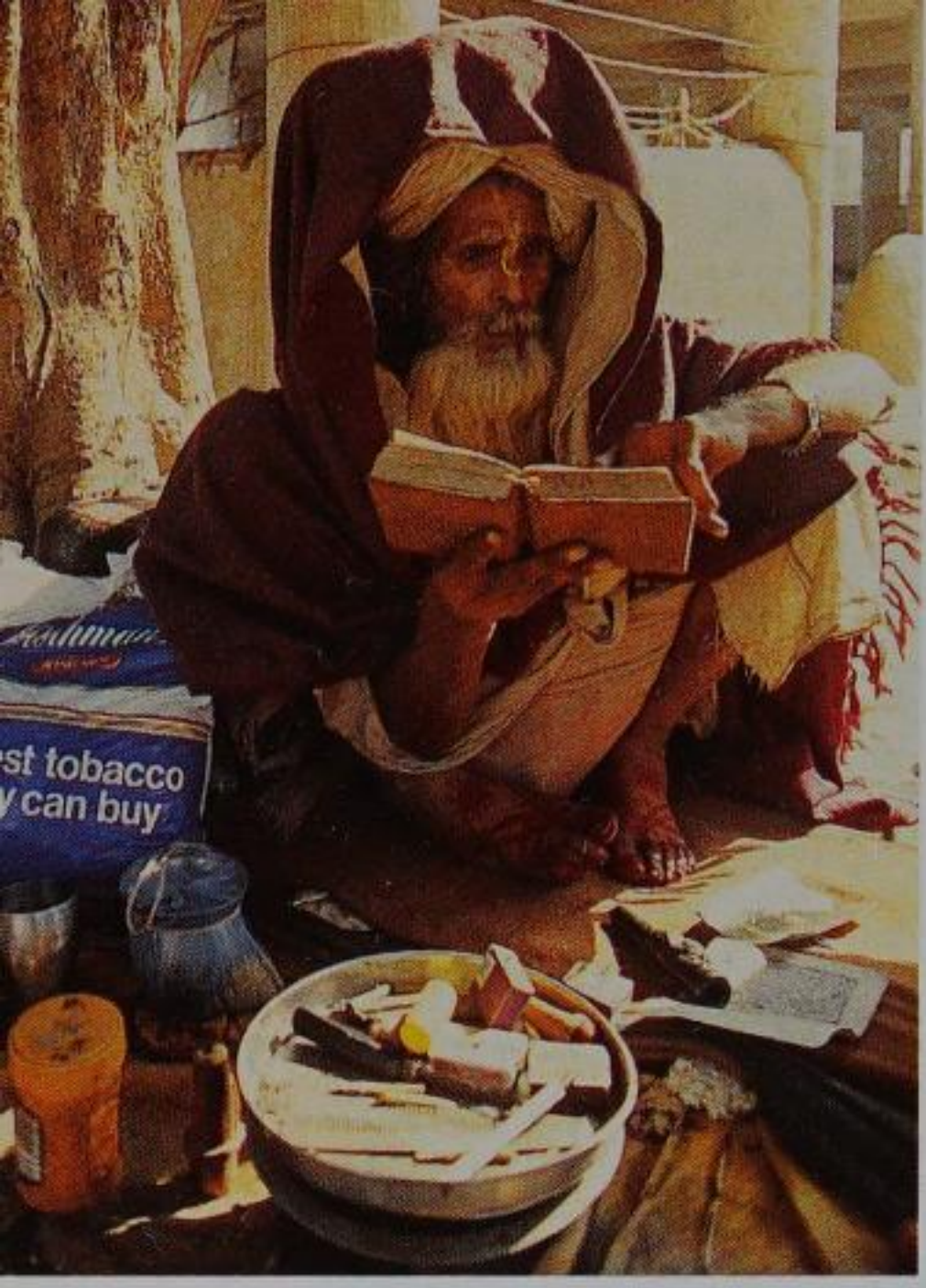
Tulsi Das
(1552-1623)

The author of the Hindi epic, *Ramcharitamanas*, Tulsi Das is acknowledged as perhaps the greatest poet of the Bhakti movement that, in the 15th-16th centuries protested against the Brahminical orthodoxy.

It was in Kashi that he composed *Ramacharitamanas*, the poem that tells the story of Lord Rama. Tulsi Das' version of the ancient epic *Ramayana* was written in an idiom the common man could follow and went a long way in popularising the worship of Rama in North India.

Tusli Das, who came to Varanasi as a boy, developed for the city an attachment bordering on adoration. In the *Vinaya-Patrika*, in fact, he hails Kashi as the *kamdhenu* or the wish-granting cow:

Serve with love all life through Kashi
The wishing-cow of all this Kali Yug;
It banishes woe, affliction, sin, disease,
And it amasses all things auspicious.



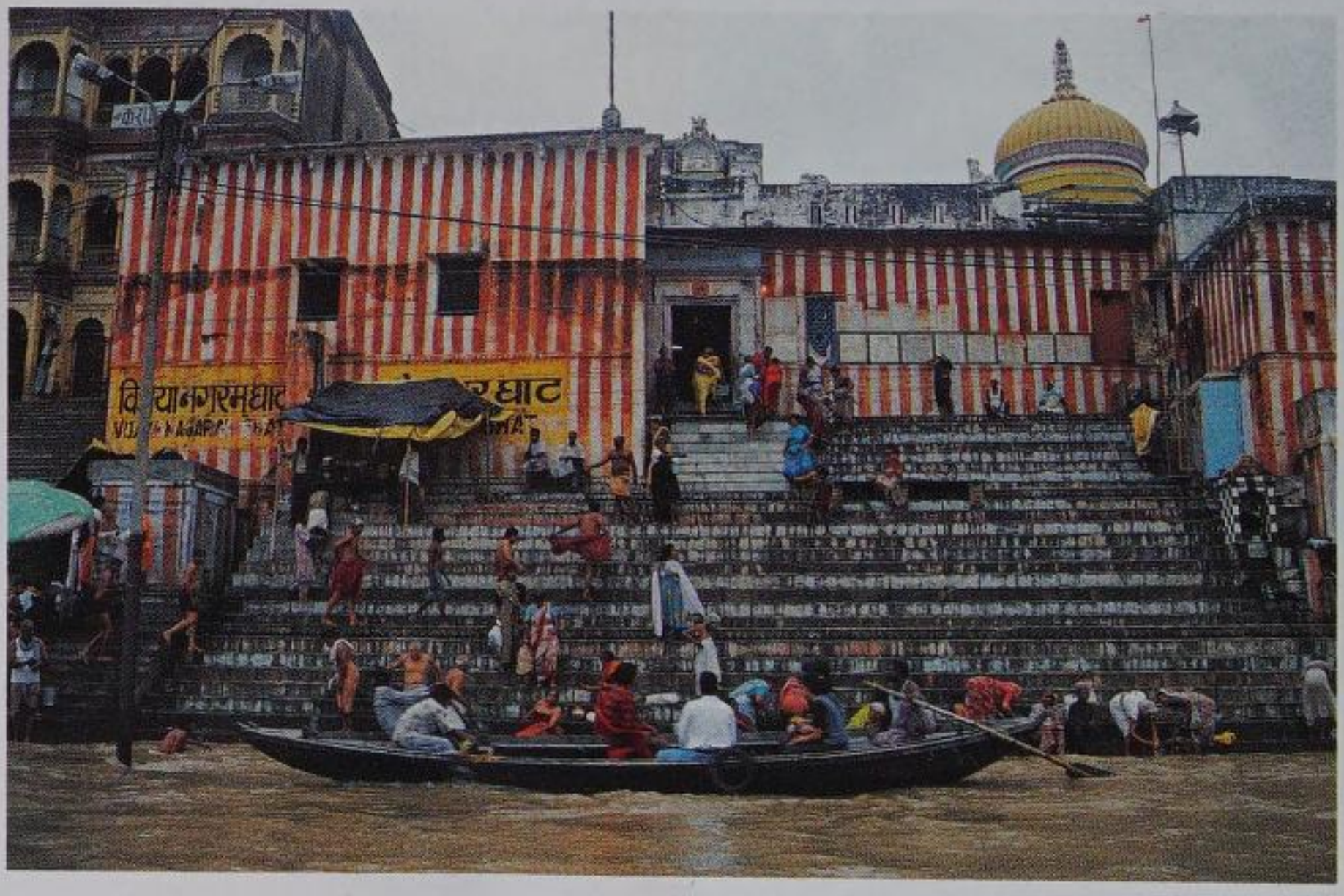
Then come to **Harishchandra**, a burning *ghat* on the riverfront named after the legendary king who chose honesty above everything and was reduced to working as a lowly *dom* or scavenger at the cremation ground. People in this part of the city believe that this is the oldest cremation ground in Varanasi, surpassing even Manikarnika Ghat in its sanctity.

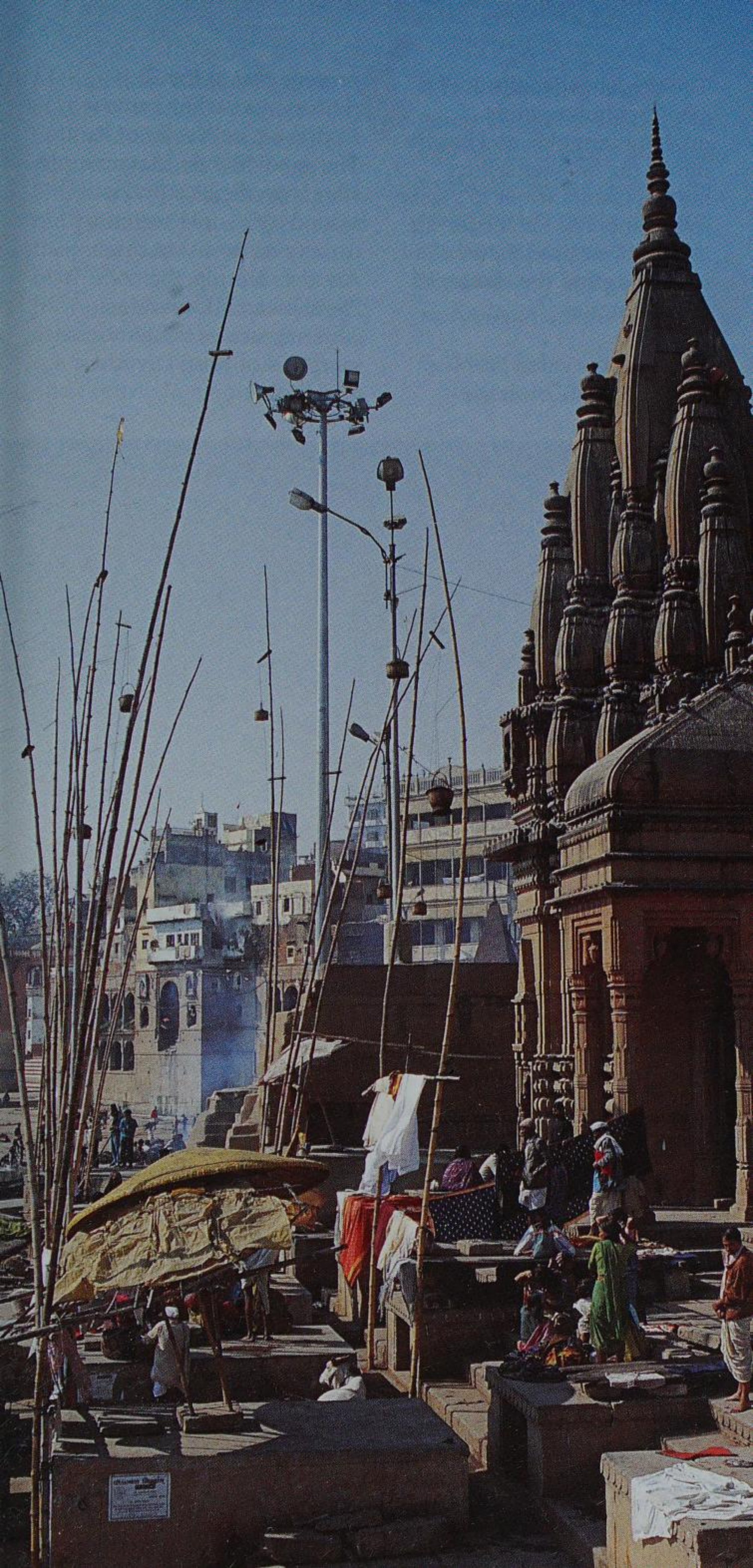
Going past Bhelupura on the Sonarpura Road is the narrow Kedar Gali leading to **Kedar Ghat**. The ancient temple of Kedareshwara is especially revered by pilgrims from South India. The temple is also the supposed site of the legendary *jyotirlinga*.

Along the river, go past the **Anandamayee Ghat**, named after the 20th century woman saint whose *ashram* stands above the steps, and the imposing 17th century palace of Maharaja Chet Singh that is over a *ghat* known as **Shivala**.

Hanuman Ghat is where Vallabha, the devotional teacher of the Krishna Bhakti cult, lived during the 15th century. Tulsi Das built a Hanuman temple here which gives the *ghat* its name.

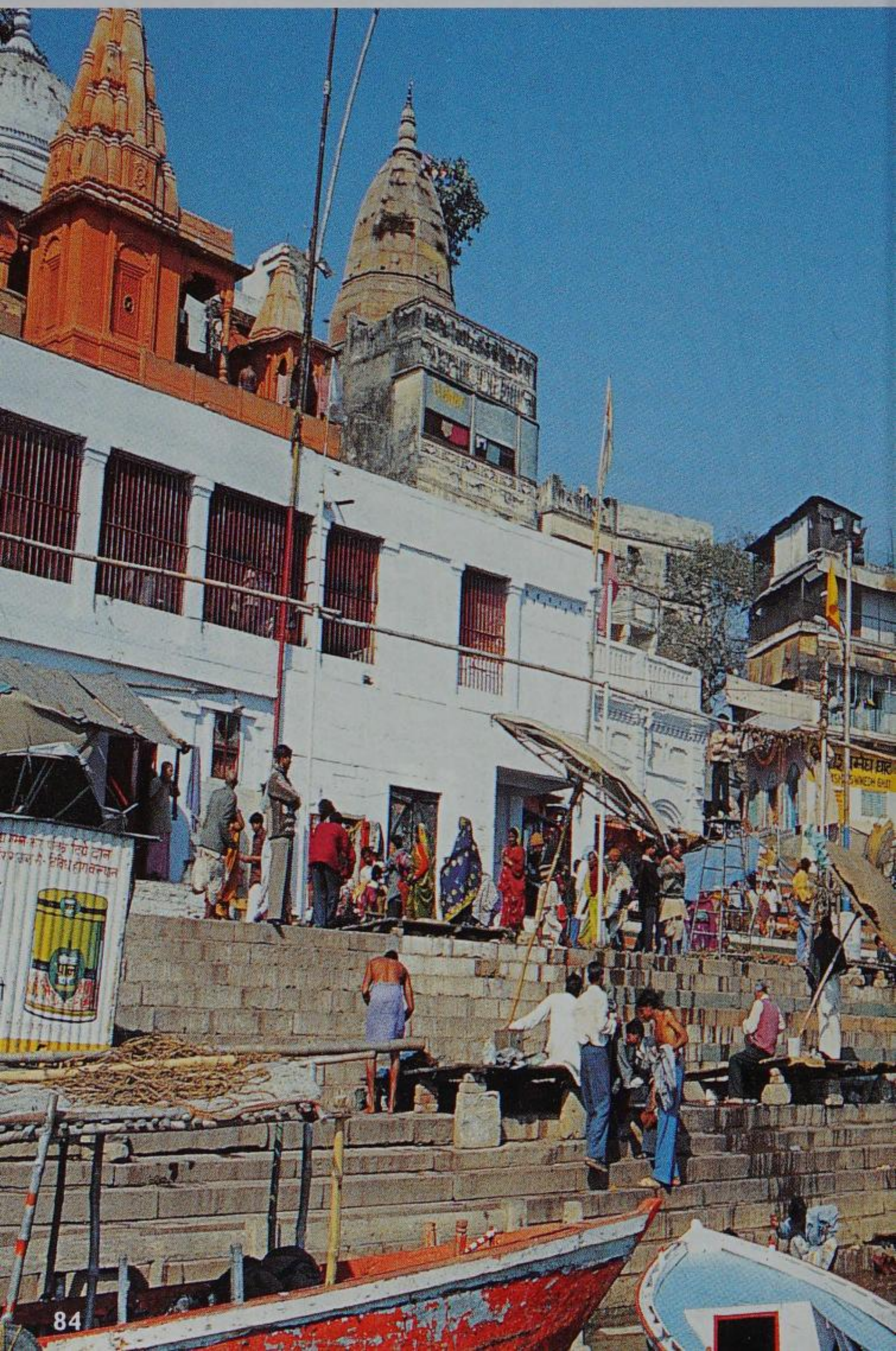
Dasashwamedh Ghat is conveniently located just a short walk away from Godoulia Crossing, as well as the Vishwanath Temple. Priests sit on wooden *chaukis* under huge reed umbrellas, often with a calf tethered nearby, and wait for pilgrims.





The flower-seller sits on the steps behind mounds of golden marigolds and beside him is the hawker selling bottled Ganga water in plastic jerry-cans. The air carries the aroma of incense, the smell of cow-dung and the chatter of many tongues.

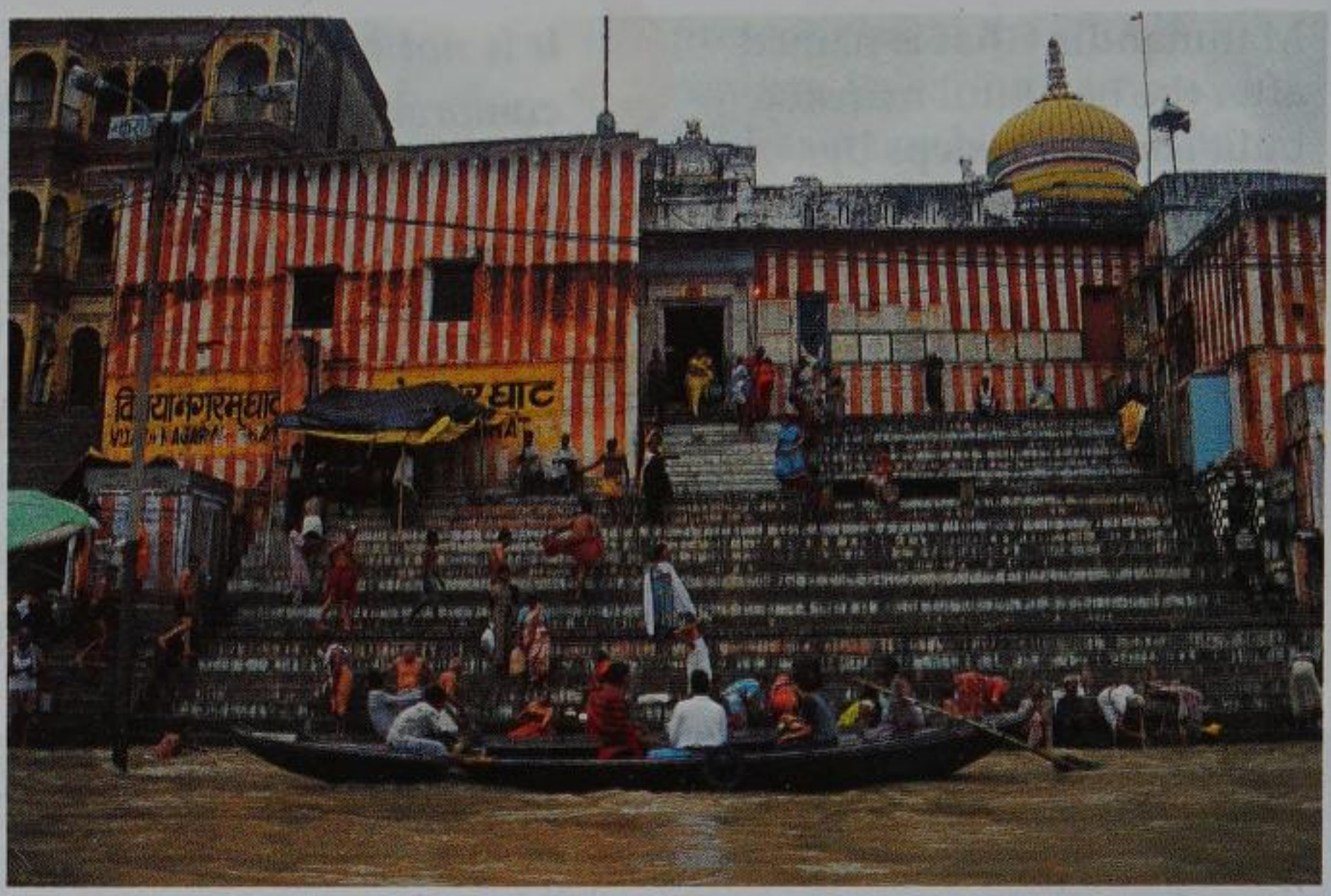
The Maratha ruler, Peshwa Balaji Baji Rao, built the present *ghat* in the 18th century. Its earlier name was Rudrasara or Nectar of Rudra. The small Shitala Mata temple stands on the *ghat* and is visited by people suffering from fever and skin diseases. Another temple, the Dasashwamedheswara, commemorates the ten horse sacrifices of King Divodasa at this *ghat*.



Manmandir Ghat is named after the beautiful mansion built above the steps by Akbar's general, Raja Man Singh. In 1710, Raja Jai Singh built an observatory here called the Jantar Mantar (*jantra* or instruments and *mantra* or formulae) housing fascinating astronomical instruments. It is open from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm and is closed on Sundays.

It is not an easy city to comprehend for those of us who stand outside the Hindu tradition. As we survey the riverfront at dawn, we are challenged to comprehend the whole of India in one sweeping glance.

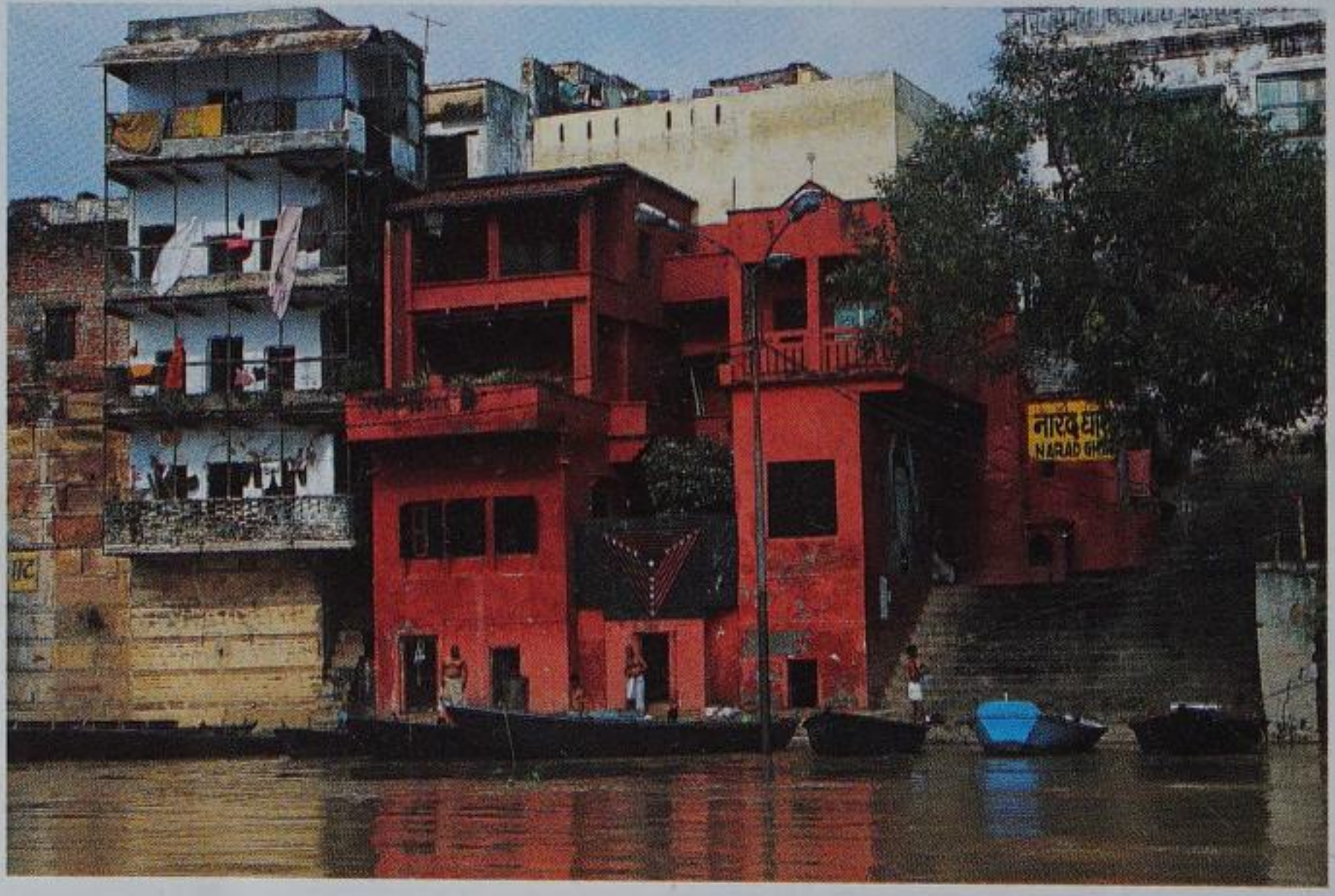
– Diana Eck
Banaras: City of Light, 1983



Lalita Ghat was built by an 18th century king of Nepal, who also added a wooden temple modelled on the famous Pashupatinath Temple of Kathmandu.

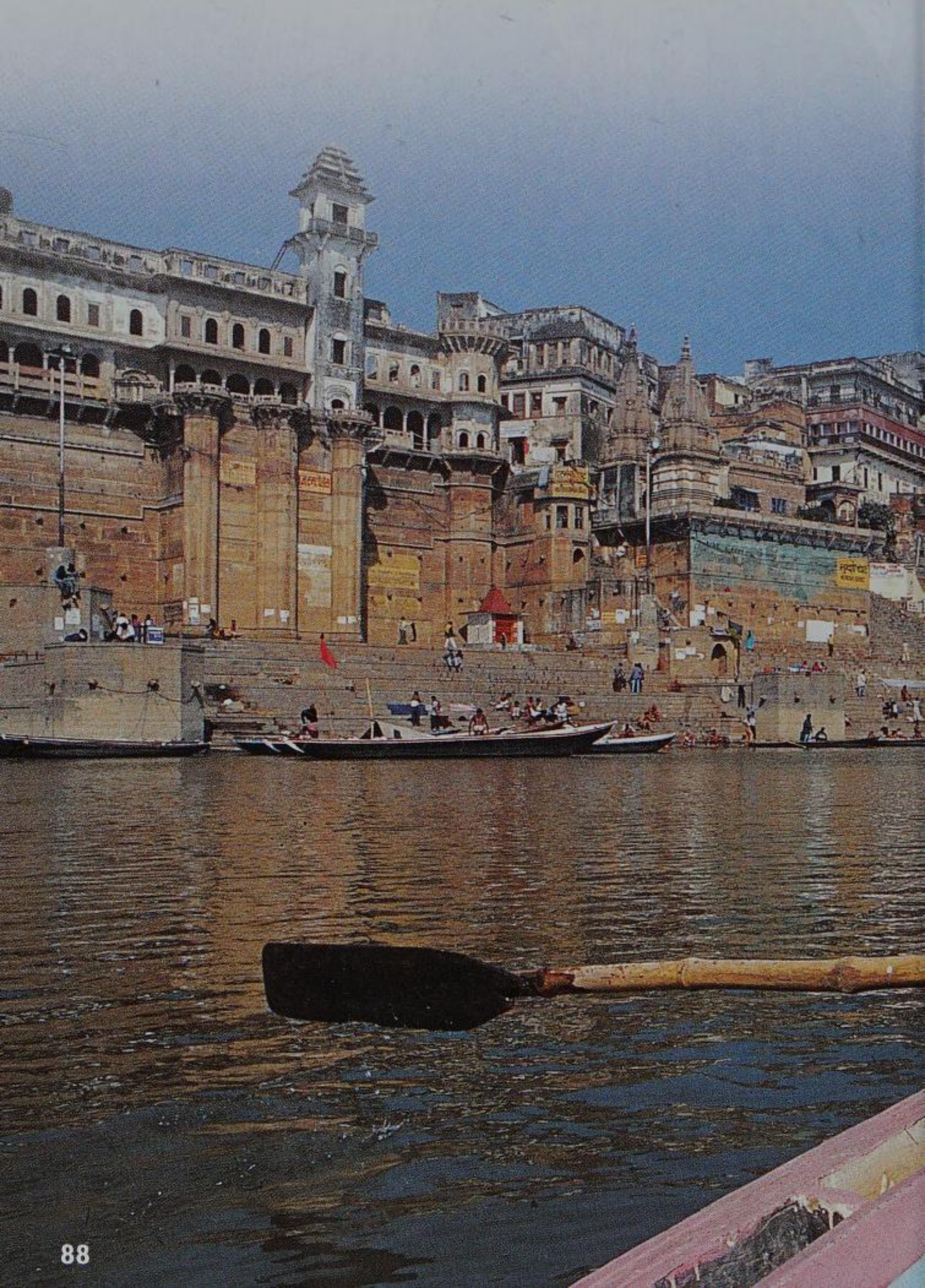
A narrow *gali* from the Chowk leads you to **Manikarnika**, the most important cremation *ghat* of Varanasi. Hundreds of mourners and professional pall-bearers go along the *gali* carrying dead bodies. It is said that the fires of this *ghat* have not gone out in centuries and even during the day the place is wreathed in smoke. The *ghat* is lined with cargo boats heaped with wood for the incessantly burning pyres.

Next to the *ghat* is a stepped tank, the Chakrapushkarni or Vishnu's Lotus Pool. It is said that Goddess Parvati dropped her *manikarnika* or jewelled earring here. At Shiva's request, Vishnu dug deep with his *chakra* or discus to search



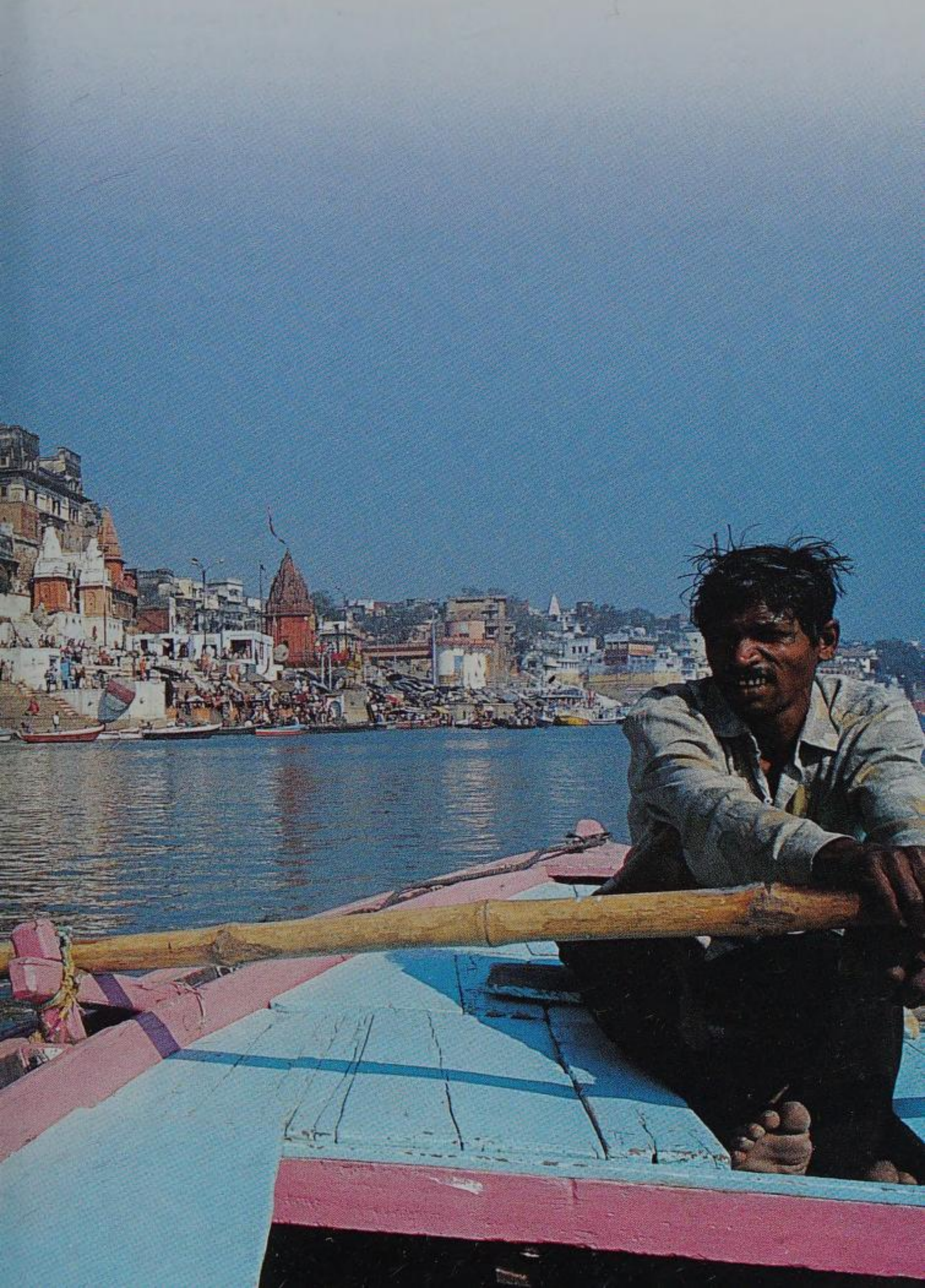
for it and the hollow filled with his sweat to create a pool. In gratitude for his recovering the earring, Shiva granted the pool and the *ghat* to Vishnu. So this is Vishnu's special place in Shiva's city and his footprints, the *charanapaduka*, are worshipped at the temple at the head of the steps. The Maharajas of Kashi are cremated next to this temple.

The **Panchganga Ghat,** north of Manikarnika, possesses the power of five mysterious streams that flow symbolically into the Ganga – the Dhutpapa (cleansed of sins), the Kirana (sun's rays), the Dharmanada (river of *dharma*), the Yamuna and the Saraswati. The legendary Bindumadhav Temple once stood here. Of the six-foot high idol of



Vishnu in this temple, Tulsi Das wrote, 'Blessed are the eyes of those men who have the sight of you!' Today the *ghat* is dominated by the Alamgir Mosque that Aurangzeb built after demolishing the temple.

This is the *ghat* where widows come on Kartik Purnima to light lamps for their dead husbands. This *ghat* also has the *ashrams* and *mathas* of important religious sects like the Ramananda, the Tailangaswami and the Ballabhacharya. Even today these institutions are centres of Indian philosophy and religion.



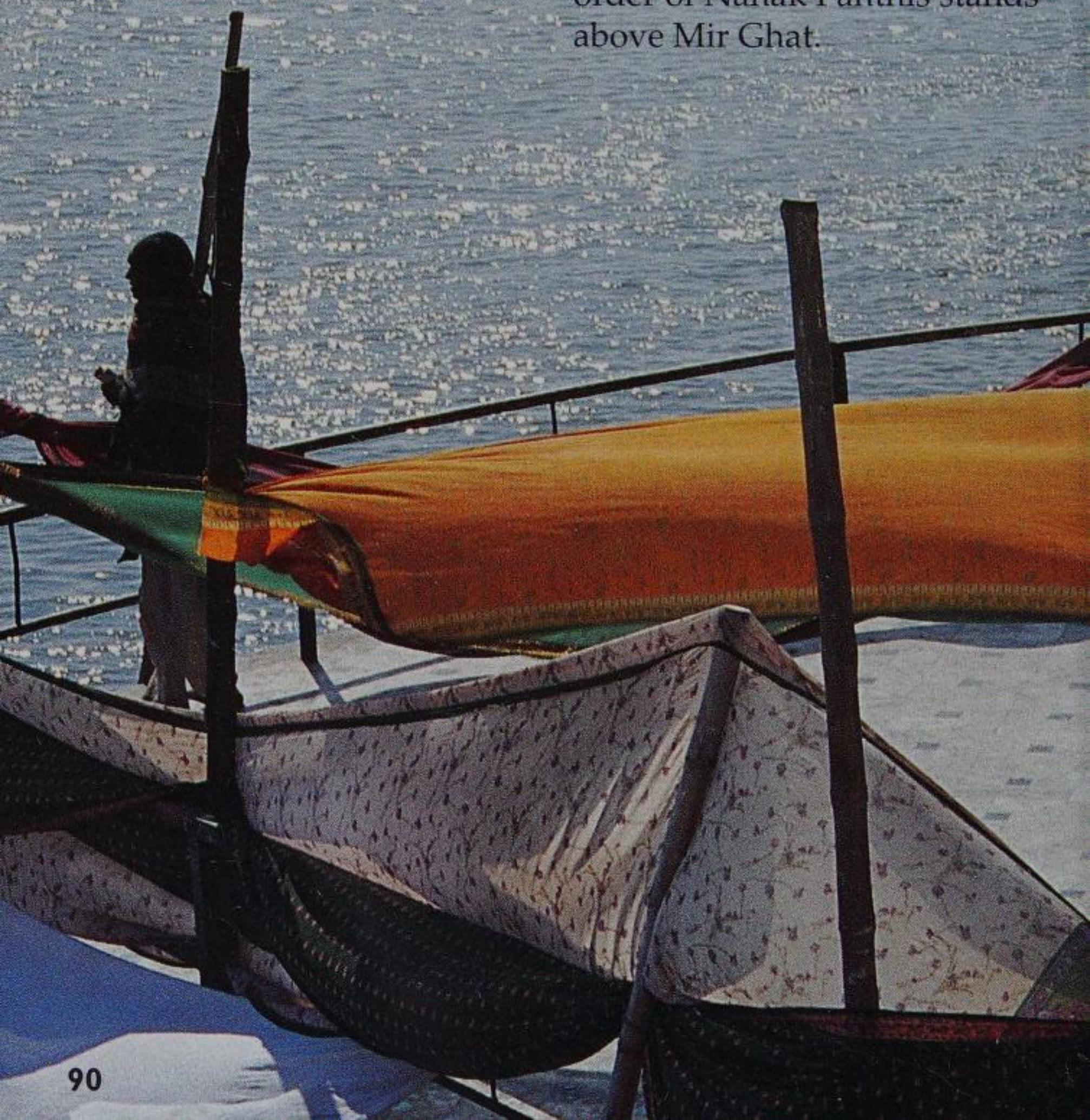
Some other ghats

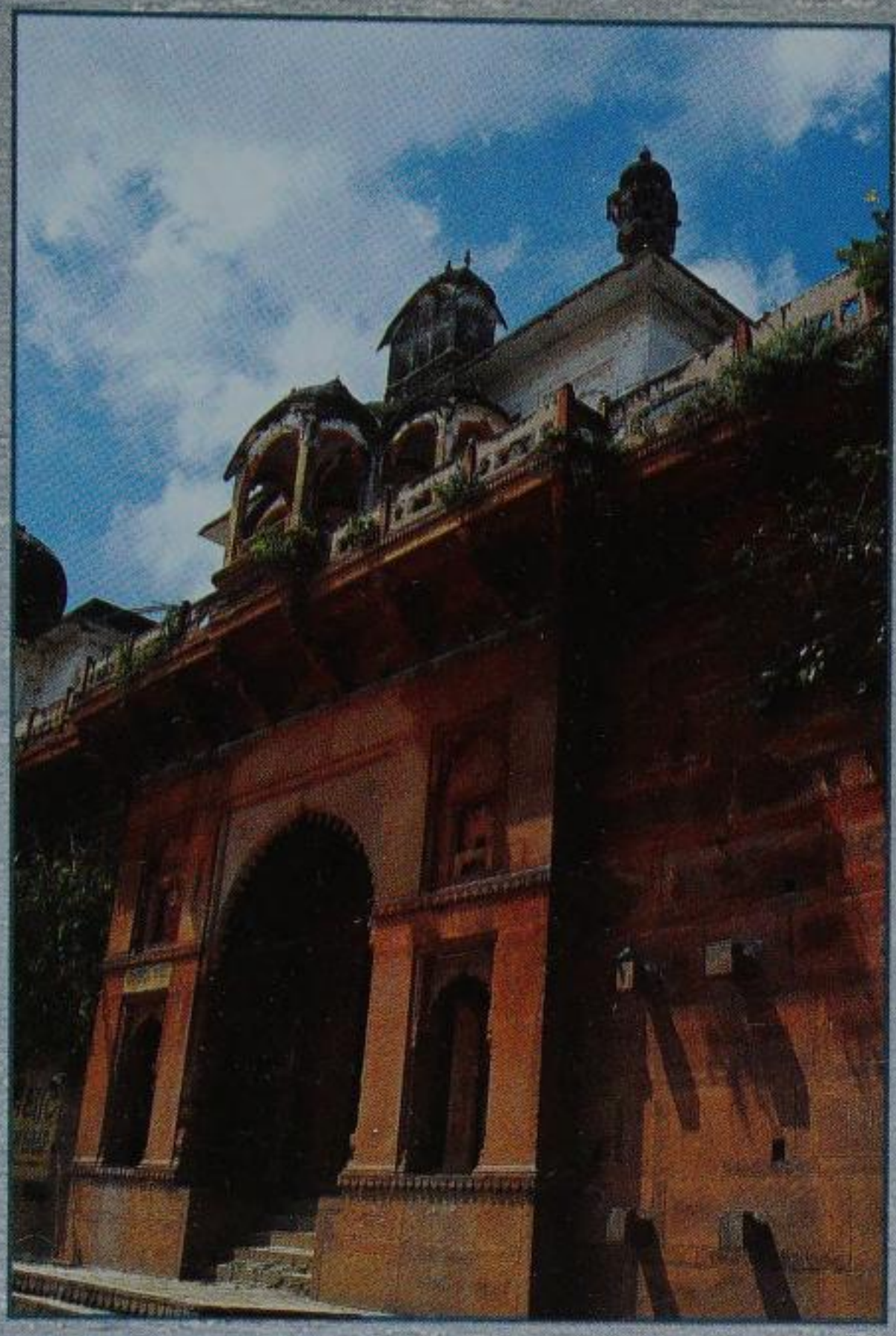
Ahilya Bai Holkar, the queen of Indore, built **Ahilyabai Ghat**, and **Mir Ghat** was built by a Muslim governor.

Chausatthi Ghat is named after sixty-four goddesses, and the goddesses Durga, Shitala, Sankata, Tripura Bhairavi all have *ghats* named after them. Oddly enough, the patron goddess of the city, Varanasi Devi, only has a temple above **Trilochana Ghat**.

While some *ghats* have legends associated with them, others are simply used by the people who live above them for their daily communion with their beloved Ganga. Still others have a more plebeian reputation. The milkmen and their milk cans are to be found at **Chowki Ghat**. The washermen bring their bundles of clothes to the clay bank of **Prabhu Ghat**. You do penance for killing a cow at **Gai Ghat** and wrestling and boxing festivals are held at **Durga Ghat**.

Different *ghats* are patronised by people of different communities. **Bachcharaj Ghat** is popular with Jains, Bengalis crowd Kedar, Chowki and Chausatthi. South Indians prefer **Hanuman**, **Karnataka**, **Harishchandra** and **Vijayanagram**. Biharis come to Assi and **Janaki**. **Tripurabhairavi** and Manmandir see pilgrims from Rajasthan. Gujaratis prefer to bathe at **Sankata Ghat** and the centre of the Sikh religious order of Nanak Panthis stands above Mir Ghat.





Temples

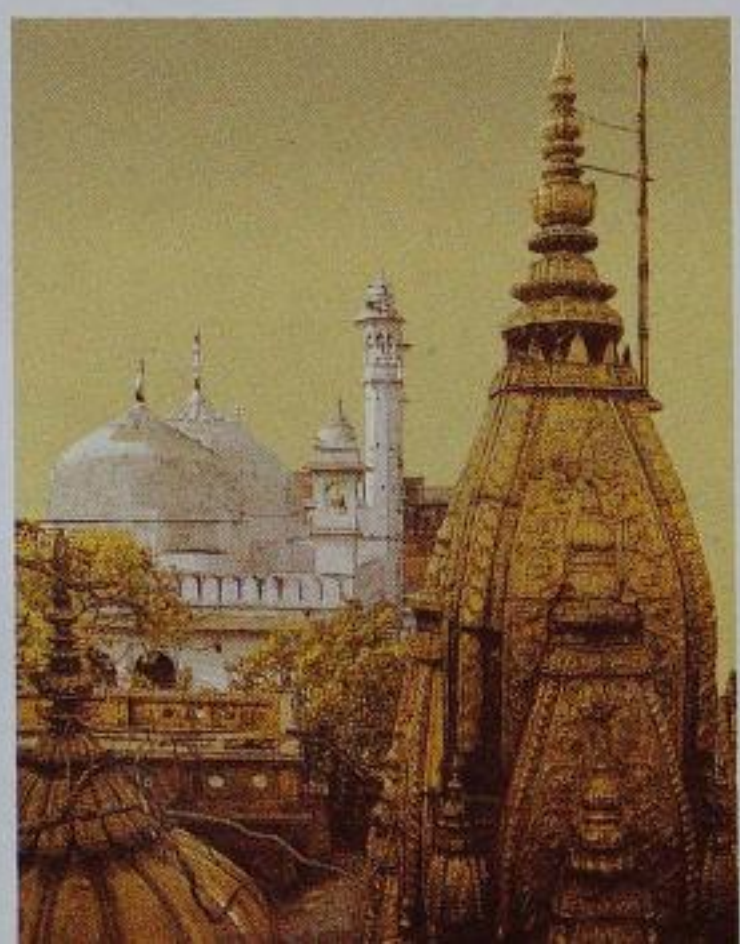
Varanasi has over two thousand temples – some are gigantic monuments, others only wayside shrines. In Varanasi, even a pile of sculpted temple remains under a tree receives devout offerings. And almost every home and every lane has its own shrine.

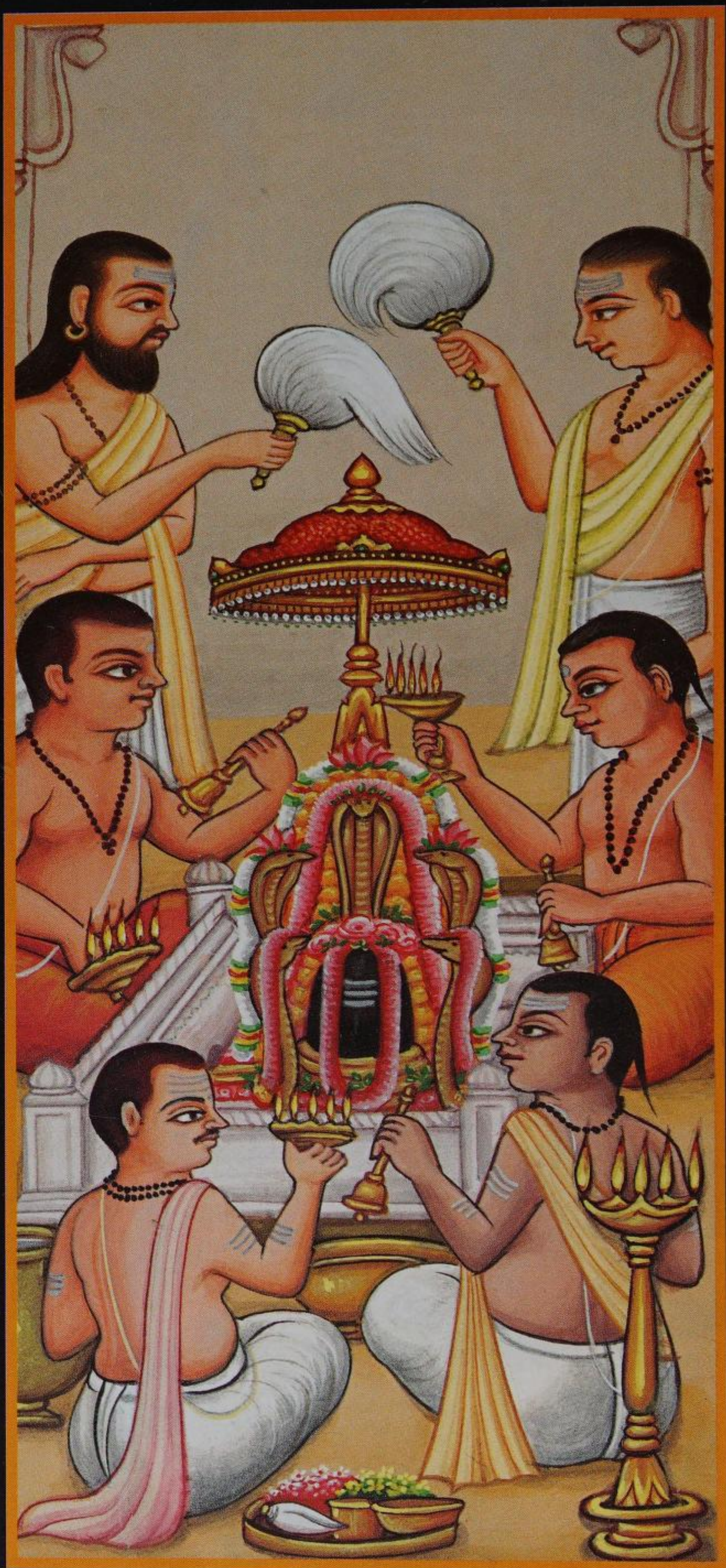
The temples of Varanasi cannot lay claim to any great antiquity, having been ravaged by Muslim invaders time and time again. Yet, the conqueror's sword has not been able to erase their spiritual resonance.

Vishwanath Temple

Vishwanath Temple, one of the most important Shiva temples in India, is the pre-eminent shrine of Varanasi. *Vishwanath* in Sanskrit means Lord or *natha* of the Universe or *vishwa*, and it is only correct that Shiva should be known by this name in his own city.

The present Vishwanath Temple does not have any architectural grandeur. In 1785, Queen Ahilyabai Holkar of Indore built the temple that is standing today. It is located in a narrow, winding *gali* off Dasashwamedh Ghat. Next to it is Gyanvapi Mosque built by Aurangzeb when his armies destroyed the temple in the 17th century.





Vishwanath Temple *Aarti*

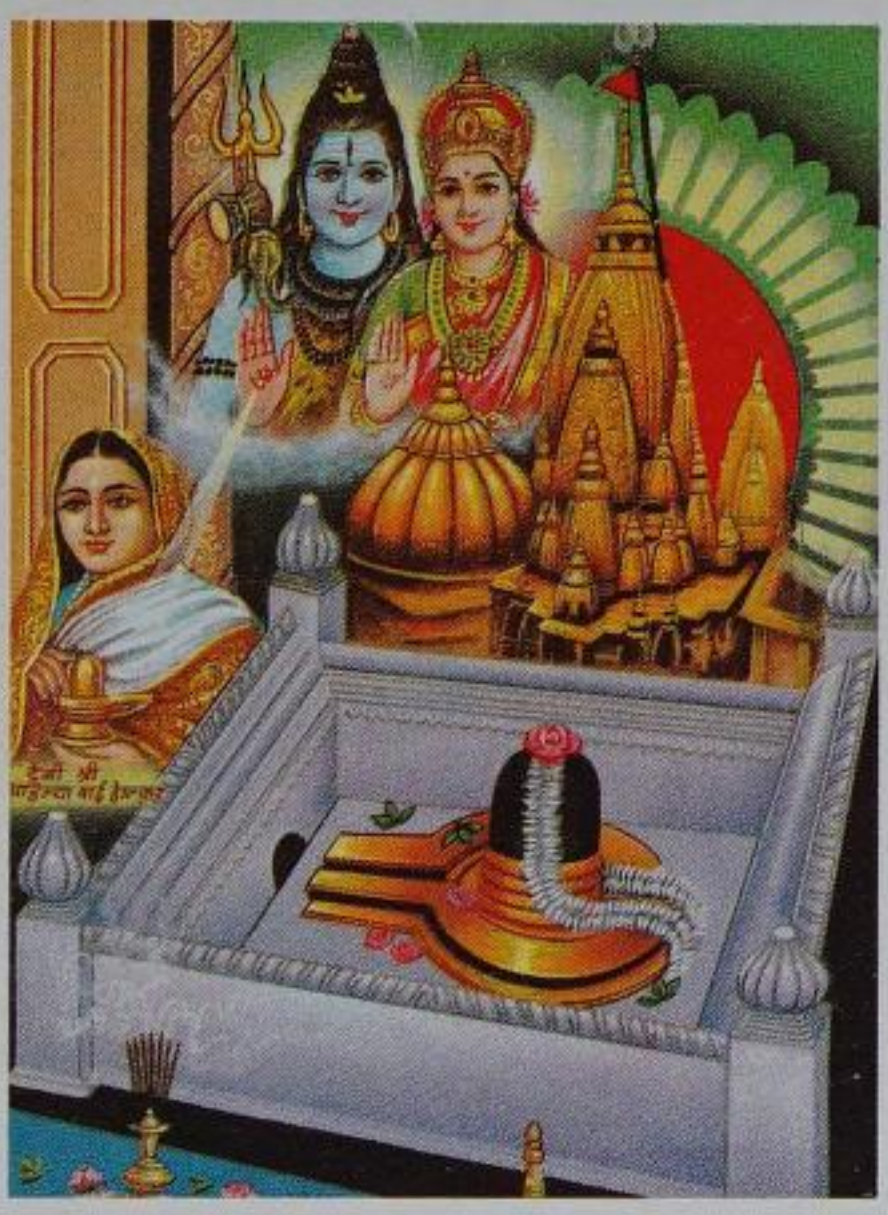
There are five daily *aartis* at Vishwanath Temple. Eleven priests prepare the black stone *linga* for the *aarti* amidst loud chanting. The *linga* is first bathed in the holy waters of the Ganga, and then anointed with sandalwood paste, and an intoxicating concoction of cannabis or *bhang*, honey, *ghee* and finally milk. It is decorated lavishly with garlands of marigold, rose and jasmine, till the stone shaft is completely buried.

Finally, to the sound of conch shells, bells and drums, the many-flamed oil lamps are lit and ritually waved before the god. The whole temple precinct is suffused with the heavy fragrance of *dhoop*.The ritual ends as the music reaches a deafening crescendo that reverberates down the lane.

Timings:
Mangala Aarti 3.30 am
Bhog Aarti 12 noon
Saptarishi Aarti 7.30 pm
Shringar Aarti 11.00 pm
Shayan Aarti 11.00 pm

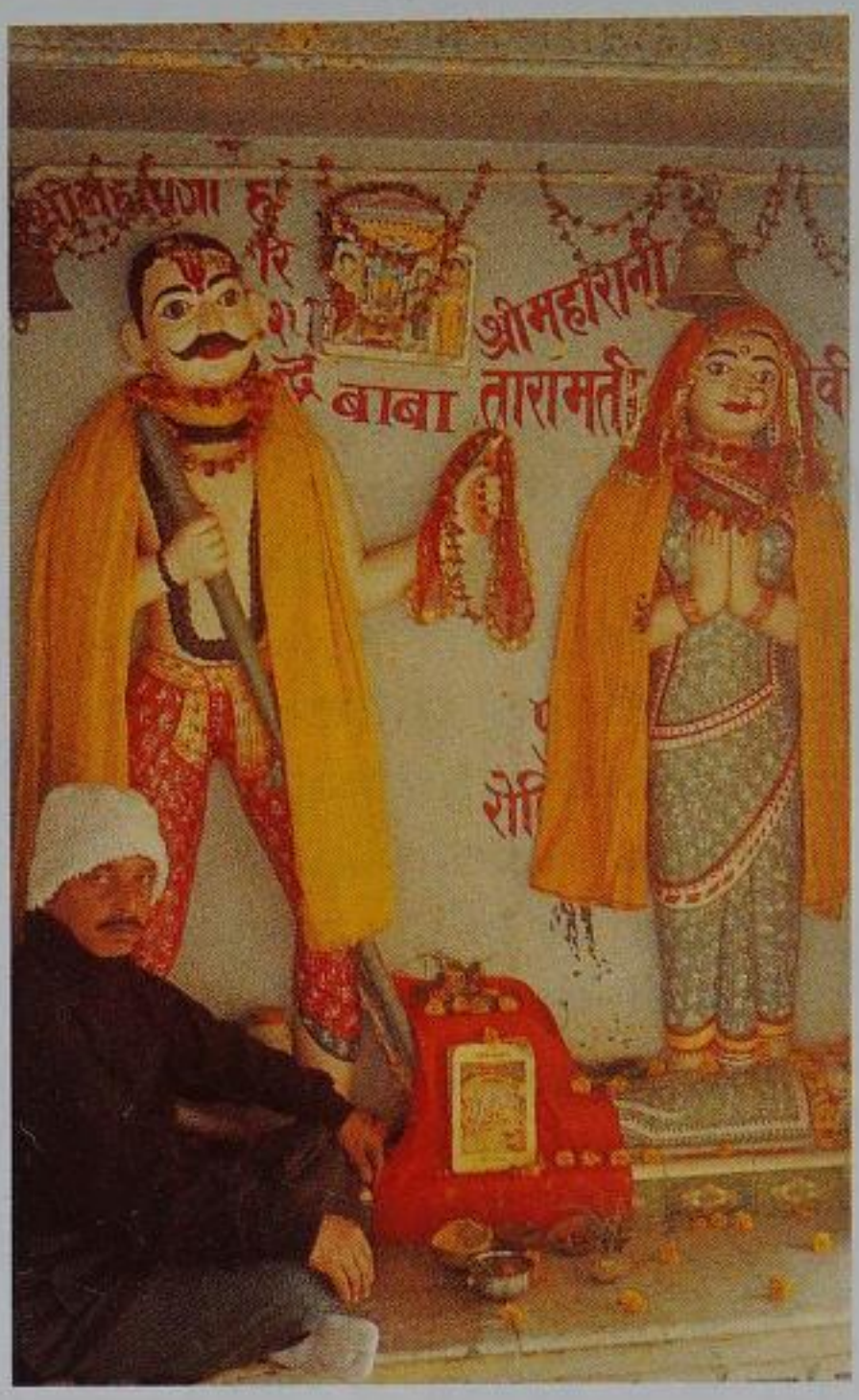
A carved gateway leads to the white marble temple, topped by golden spires. The spires were plated in 1835, using 820 kg of gold donated by Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of Punjab.

The atmosphere of devotion here is almost palpable. For the pilgrim who may have travelled a thousand miles, the sanctity of the temple is only heightened by the teeming crowds, the chanting of *mantras* and the continuous



ringing of bells. Wrought silver doors lead to the sanctum. The *linga* of smooth black stone is set in a square silver altar.

Within the courtyard stand many smaller shrines, and a 2.1-metre high figure of Shiva's bull, Nandi. Between the temple and Aurangzeb's mosque stands Gyanvapi, the Well of Knowledge, where the ancient Shiva *linga* is said to have been hidden when Aurangzeb attacked the city.



Almost every twist in the lanes of Varanasi reveals a wayside shrine

Pilgrims drink from this well to gain knowledge and wisdom. Like with most other temples in Varanasi, only Hindus are allowed to enter.

The minarets of Gyanvapi Mosque loom above the temple. Two beautiful columns from the ancient Adivishweshwara temple still stand before the mosque. On Fridays, the faithful congregate here for prayers.

The temple closes at 11.00 pm, except on Mahashivratri when it is open all night

Annapurna Temple

A short distance away is Annapurna Temple built in 1725 by the Maratha chieftain, Peshwa Baji Rao I. It is believed that whoever worships goddess Annapurna never goes hungry.

During the annual Annakuta festival, just after Diwali, mountains of fruits, sweets and cereals are laid out before the goddess and then distributed to the poor.

Sakshi Vinayak Temple

Traditionally, every visitor to Vishwanath Temple has to pay obeisance to Ganesha enshrined in this temple. It is said that Ganesha acts as a *sakshi* or witness to the pilgrimage and maintains a record of every pilgrim who has ever come here.

Kalbhairav Temple

Kalbhairav is the protector of the city of Kashi. The temple, on Chaukhamba, houses the stone image of Bhairav with a silver face and four hands, with a dog next to him. Bhairav's wish-fulfilling power is invoked by offerings of liquor and candy dogs.

Durga Temple

This 18th century temple dedicated to Goddess Durga stands on a high platform within a quadrangular court. Twelve carved pillars support the central spire. The temple is flanked by a music gallery and a stepped tank.

In 1808, the Collector of Benaras, William James Grant, presented the temple one of the bells hanging in the porch after he was saved from drowning by a boatman who invoked the goddess before the rescue.

Durga Temple

Tilbhandareshvar Mahadev

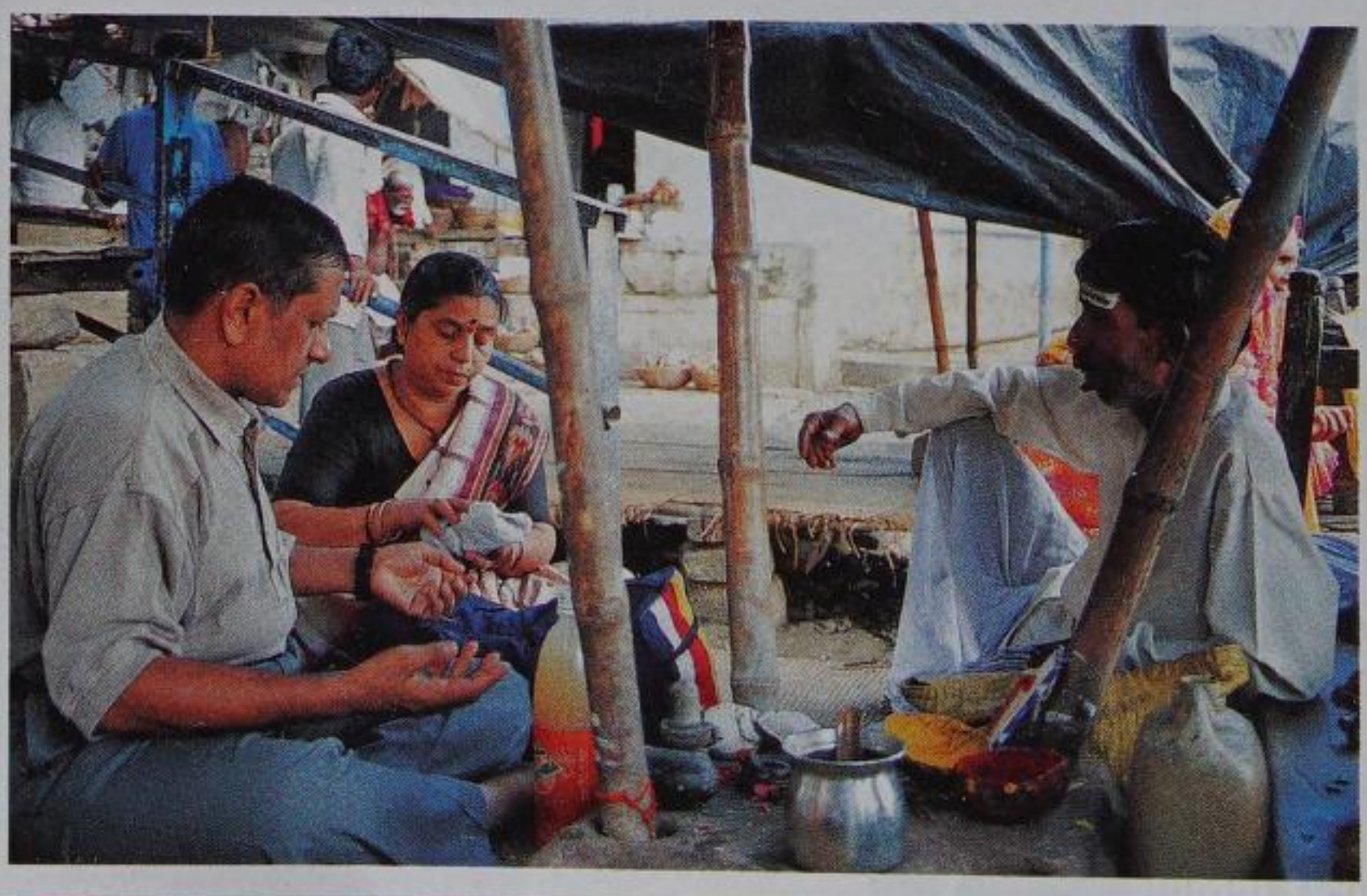
Off Madanpura Road is a spartan temple that houses a tall *linga*, over a metre high. The resident priest will tell you that it is still growing by the height of a sesame seed or *til*, each day. During the *Shivaratri* festival the *linga* is covered with a copper mask with five faces.

Sankat Mochan Temple

Built by the poet Tulsi Das, this temple is dedicated to the monkey god, Hanuman. The spacious and shady precincts are a popular venue for religious discourses, fairs and an annual music festival.

Encounter with Pandas

The Brahmin priests of Varanasi are called *pandas*. They are a persistent lot, determined to help you cleanse your sins and perform your religious rituals. They will also offer you *moksha* at your convenience and within your budget. A *panda* will chase you from earth to the water and you cannot escape them even on a boatride. They will row up to you and will cajole and even coerce you to make offerings to Mother Ganga. Be firm in your interactions.



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स्वर्गीय रामनाथ भाभी धर्मपत्नी स्वर्गीय जमुना देवी

पावित पुत्र खिल्लना

ने श्री हनुमान जी का चर [illegible] अर्पित किया

निवास-दशाश्वमेध, प्रयाग [illegible] वाराणसी

ता [illegible] सन् १९८५ ई संवत २०४२

समाधि-मन्दिर

Kabir Temple

Located in the Kabirchaura area, this memorial to the poet Kabir is built on the site of his frugal home. It enshrines his portrait and some personal belongings.

Close by is **Bijak Temple** that houses no idol or religious object, because Kabir believed that God is formless. Next to this is Nirutila, the memorial to his foster parents.
The complex also houses meditation chambers and the environs reverberate with devotional hymns and recitations of Kabir's poems.

Now, tell me, O Ram,
What will be my fate?
I had left Benaras,
So foolish was I!
Like a fish
Out of water,
I was bereft of the merits
Of my former life.

My whole life I had spent
In the city of Shiva –
And now, at the point of death,
I have come to Magahar!

So many years,
I practised in Kashi –
And yet, at the point of death
I have come to Magahar!

Kashi or Magahar:
What's the difference?
With so little devotion
How could one be saved?

– Kabir Granthavali

Kabir (1398-1448)

Kabir is one of the great poets of the Bhakti era and his verses are sung with reverence even today.

Although he lived in Varanasi, where at every step lay a sacred shrine, Kabir refused to recognise the sanctity of organised religion and its dogma:

Going on endless pilgrimages,
The world died,
Exhausted by so much bathing.

Instead, Kabir believed that one could gather the merit of a sacred place through private worship:

For Kabir, mind is Mathura
and face is Kashi,
Body is the gate to Brahman
where light can be seen.

Tulsi Manas Temple

This modern temple in marble is situated near Durga Mandir. The walls are inscribed with verses from Tulsi Das' *Ramcharitmanas*. The temple also has a museum that depicts, through terracotta models, the exploits of Rama, as well as a rare collection of around 150 *Ramayana* manuscripts.

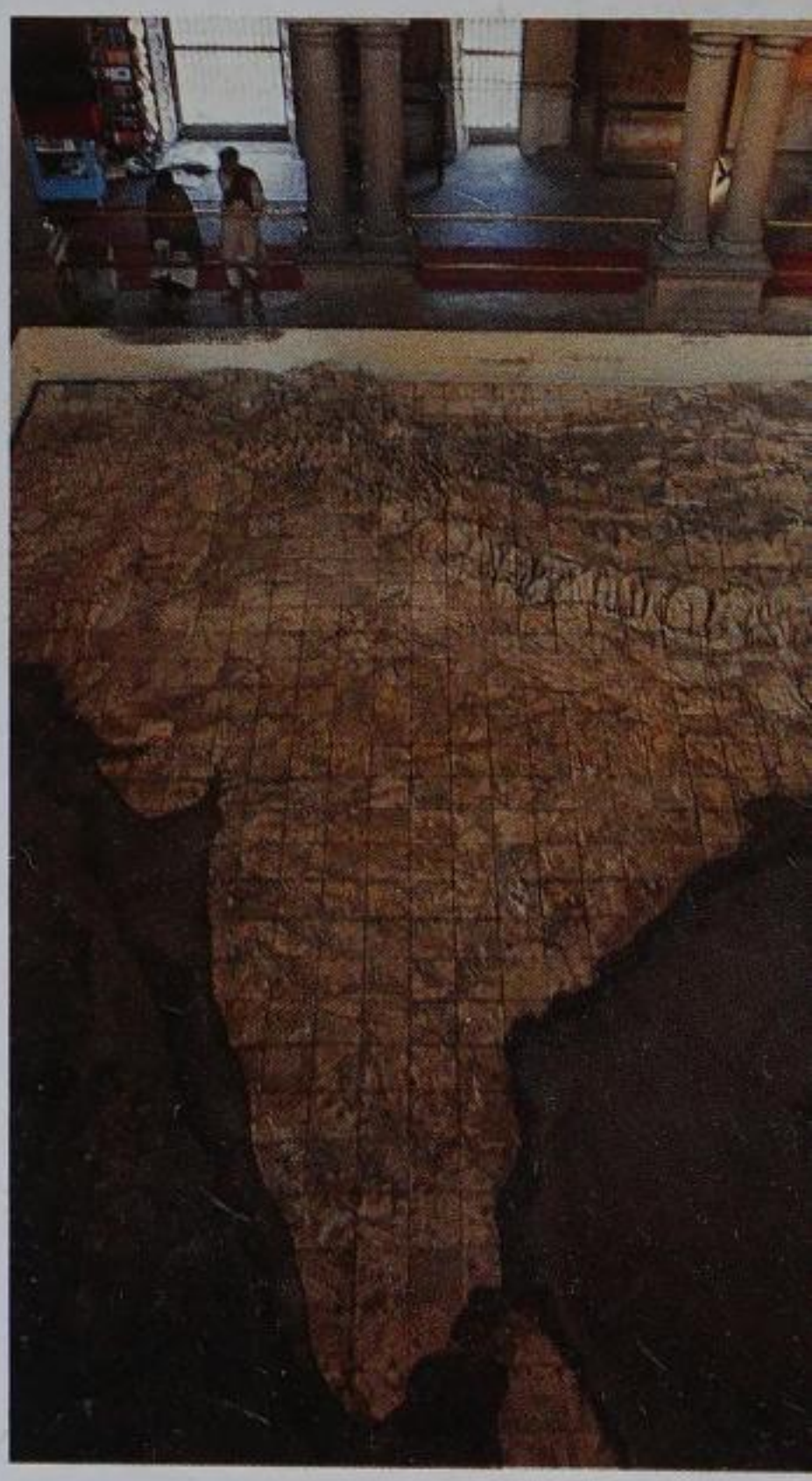
Bharat Mata Temple

This unusual temple dedicated to Mother India was built in 1936 during India's struggle for freedom. Located 1.5 kms from the railway station in the cantonment area, the temple has a relief map of India engraved in marble.

Bindumadhav Temple

The temple that was once the most magnificent in Varanasi was the Bindumadhav Temple on Panchganga Ghat.

The 17th century Italian traveller, Tavernier, noted that it was the 'greatest pagoda on the riverfront'. It was razed to the ground by Aurangzeb, who replaced it with the mammoth Alamgir Mosque, making sure the minarets soar above all the temple spires of the city.

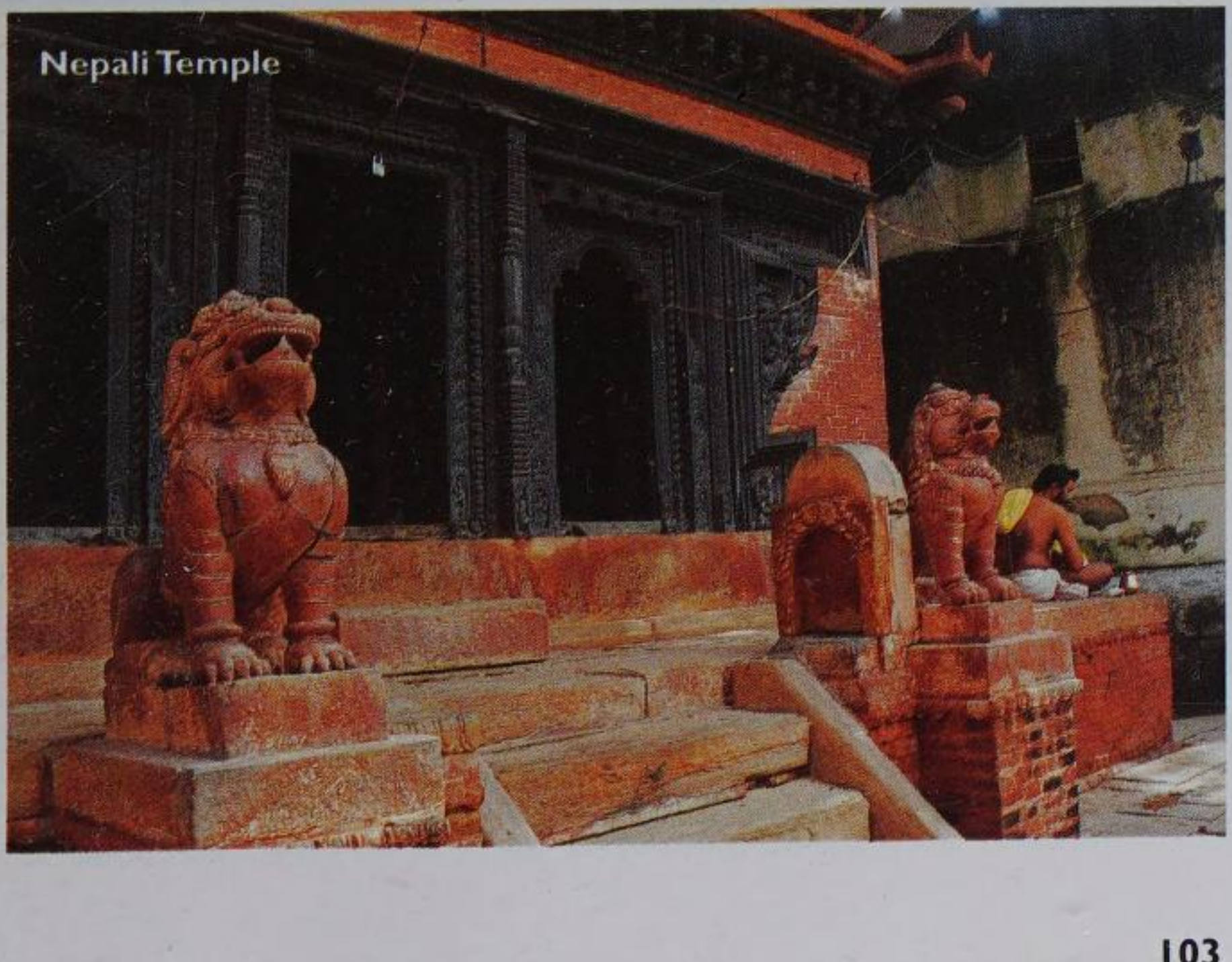


New Vishwanath Temple

Built in 1966, this white marble temple on the Banaras Hindu University campus is said to be a replica of the Vishwanath Temple that was destroyed by Aurangzeb. It houses a black stone *linga*, and has verses from Hindu scriptures inscribed on its walls. It is one of the few temples in Varanasi where people of all nationalities, castes and creeds are welcomed.

Upwards of thirty years ago, Mr James Princep made a computation of the temples and mosques in Benares.... There were at that time, in the city proper, thousand Hindu temples and 333 Mohammedan mosques. But this number of temples, which has since been increased, did not include the small shrines, the niches in the walls, the cavities inside and outside many of the houses, and the spaces on the *ghats*, in which images in immense multitudes are still deposited.... Figures of all forms, from a plain stone to the most fantastic shape, whole and mutilated, painted and unpainted, some without adornment, others decorated with garlands, or wet with sacred water, meet the eye in every direction.

– MA Sherring-
Benares: The Sacred City of the Hindus, 1868


Nepali Temple

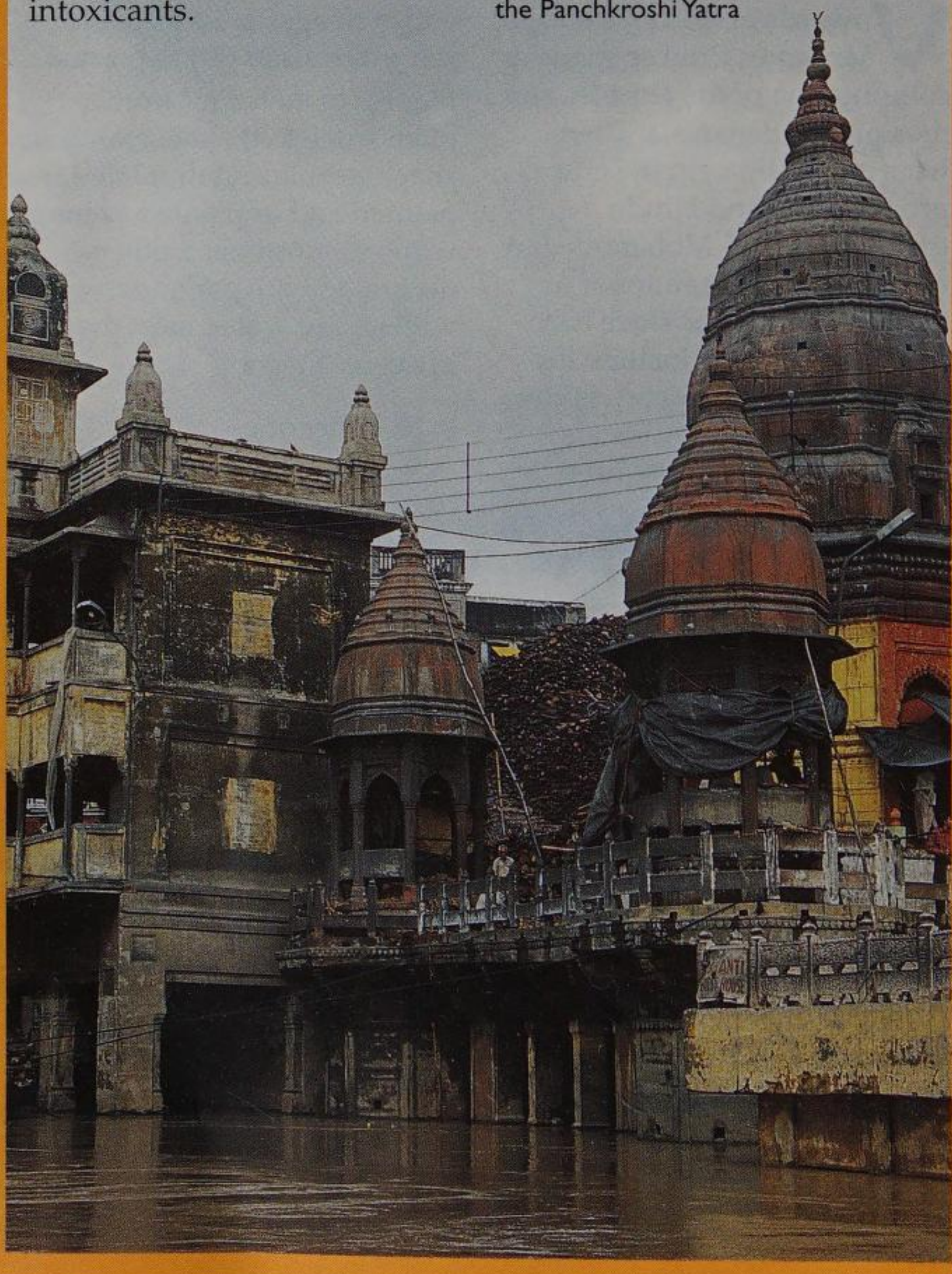
Yatras

For the devout Hindu, a *yatra* or visit to the holy places of Varanasi confers great religious merit and there are many kinds of *yatras* prescribed in the scriptures. Some *yatras* can be completed in a day while others take up to five days. The pilgrims have to undertake the journey barefoot without an umbrella, in silence, eating vegetarian food once a day and staying away from intoxicants.

Panchkroshi Yatra

This is the supreme *yatra* and the most arduous. Shiva himself is said to undertake this *yatra* twice a year. It is a five-day, 80-km trek through dusty pathways, fields and villages and takes in no less than 108 shrines.

Manikarnika Ghat is the starting point for the Panchkroshi Yatra



After prayers at Vishwanath Temple, the *yatra* begins from Manikarnika Ghat. Funerary rites and the feeding of brahmins forms part of the religious itinerary. For the next four days, the pilgrims worship at the prescribed shrines.

On the final day they reach Panchganga Ghat and bathe in the river. They walk back to Manikarnika, bathe and worship at the temples along the *ghat*, and at Vishwanath Temple. Their journey ends at Sakshi Vinayak Temple where Lord Ganesha bears witness to their having completed the Panchkroshi Yatra.

Panchtirthi Yatra

The most popular *yatra* is the one-day Panchtirthi Yatra. The pilgrimage begins at Assi Ghat, followed by a bath and prayer at the shrines of Dasashwamedheswar and Shitala Mata at Dasashwamedh Ghat.

A long walk, past slippery muddy banks, leads to Adi Keshav Ghat. The way to the fourth *tirtha*, Panchganga Ghat, is through the city. The fifth and final *ghat* is Manikarnika. Pilgrims end their *yatra* with a visit to Vishwanath and Annapurna temples and the Gyanvapi Well.

Galis & Mohallas

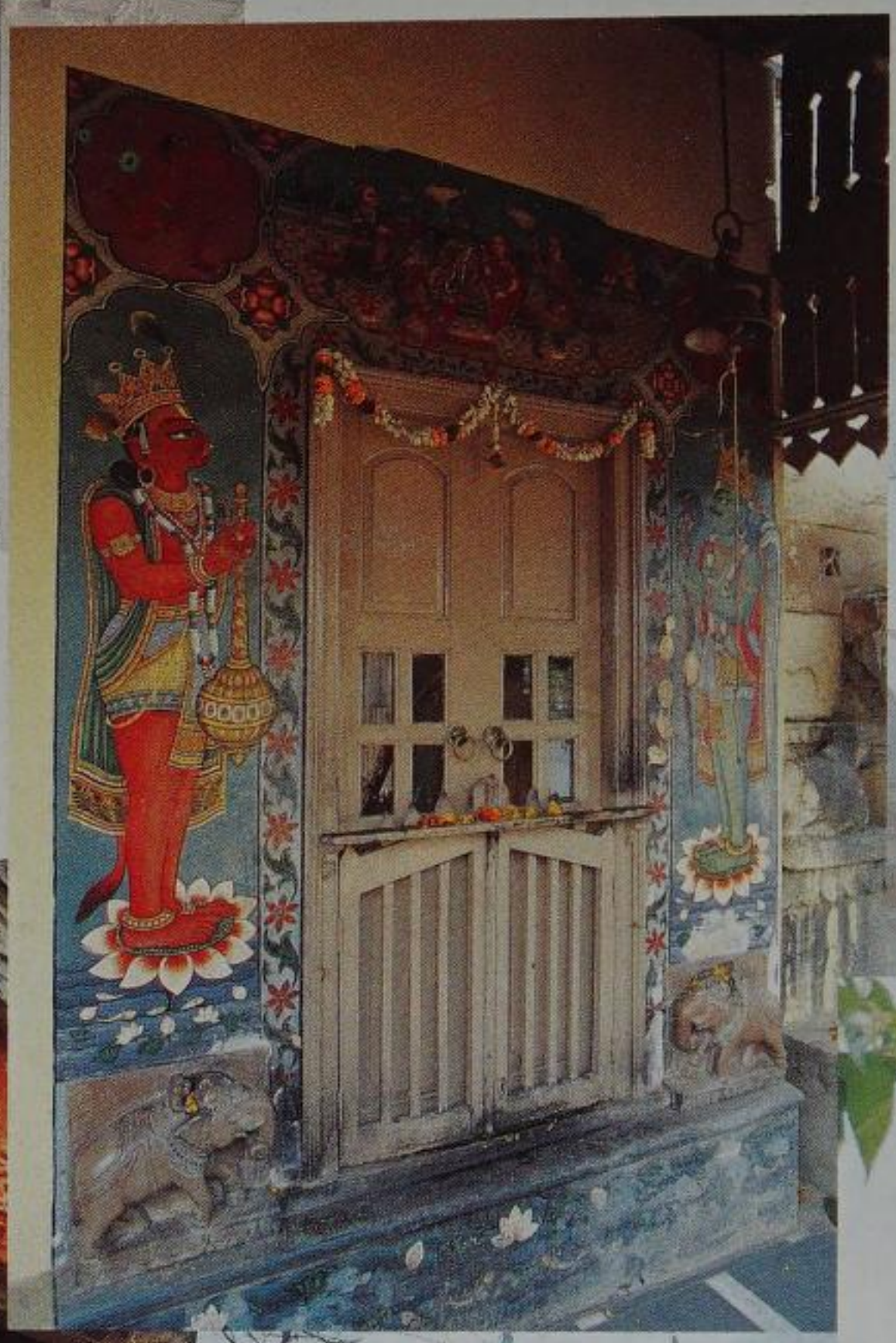
Varanasi is a maze of narrow lanes called *galis*. These lanes twist and join to form densely populated localities called *mohallas*. Tall buildings rise precariously over older foundations, with shops on the ground floor and residences above. Exquisitely carved windows and balconies overlook the lanes and the walls are adorned with bright murals of gods and goddesses. Known as the Pakka Mahal, these *mohallas* capture the essence of the city.

In these serpentine lanes, the sky is visible only as a thin strip of blue – some lanes are so narrow that if a typical Benarasi bull is walking towards you, you have to flatten yourself against the wall to let it pass. *Sadhus*, beggars, rickshaws, vendors, pilgrims and pedestrians crowd the lanes. The smell of incense and the clang of temple bells hang in the air. Monkeys swing on balconies and pigeons nestle in cornices.

As chattering children hurry to school in the early morning, vegetable vendors call out their wares and housewives haggle with great energy. The tea and *paan* stalls echo with hot discussions and groups of devotees stroll toward the nearest temple.

This is the private world of the Benarasi or the person who calls Varanasi home. Little has changed over the centuries; the only difference is that lanes which were traversed on foot now have rickshaws and scooters brushing past people.

Overleaf: The doors of Varanasi



Many of these *galis* have specialised bazaars, devoted to selling particular goods and lending their name to the neighbourhood as well. Thus we have Kachauri Gali, Khoa Gali, Dal Mandi, Thatheri Bazaar and Satti Bazaar. Some localities derive their names from the communities that live there. For instance, the Punjabis live in Lahori Tola, the Sindhis and Gujaratis in Soniya, South Indians and

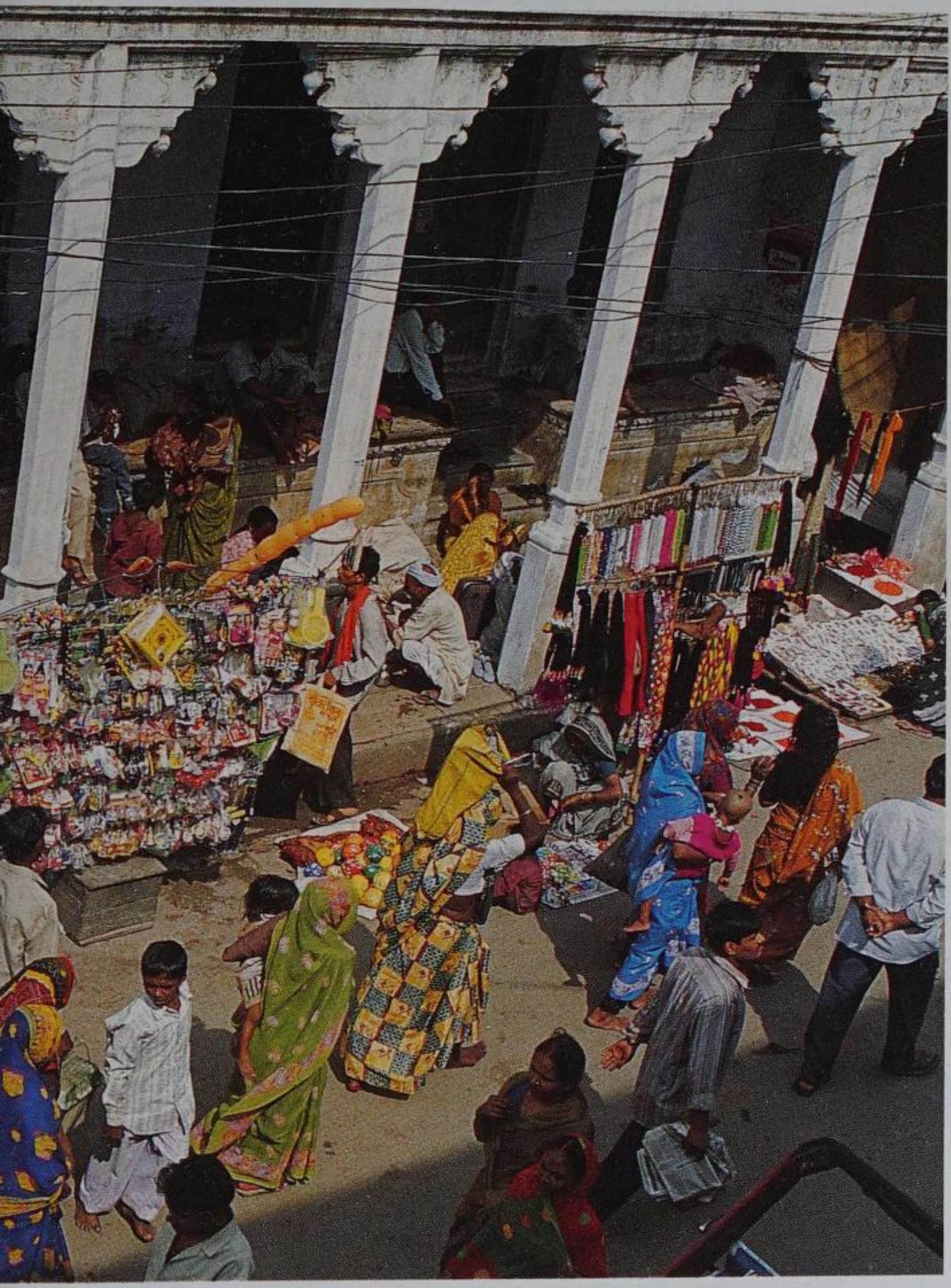
Royal Transport

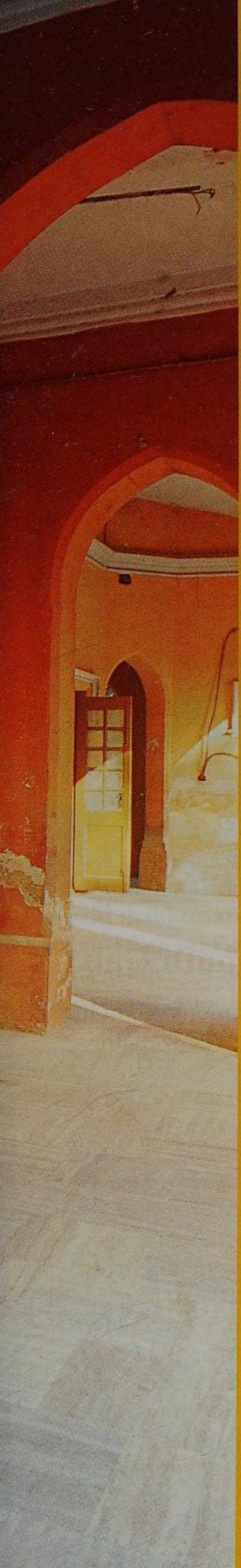
When it comes to travelling within the city, do as the citizens do – take a rickshaw, grandly titled *shahi sawari* or royal transport! People prefer them to cars as the traffic moves at the speed of the rickshaws. But the rickshawalas aren't the most enthusiastic lot. Ask one snoozing the afternoon away to drop you someplace and you are likely to get just about any excuse under the sun. 'It's too hot', 'I have just had my lunch' or even 'I don't feel up to it'.

Nepalis in Chaukhambha and Afghani settlers in Benia Bagh. Bengalis have settled in the city for centuries and they crowd Bengali Tola and the lanes leading to Kedar Ghat, while the Muslims live in Madanpura and Jalalipura.

Sometimes a locality derives its name from the temple located in it, like Baijnath from Baidyanath Temple and Madanpura from the Madaneshwar Temple. Similarly, the Vishwanath Gali derives its name from the Vishwanath Temple and Sakshi Vinayak Gali from the Sakshi Vinayak Temple.

Famous people have also lent their names to *mohallas*. Daranagar, for instance, is named after Shah Jahan's favourite son, Dara Shikoh, who was the governor of this province around 1660.

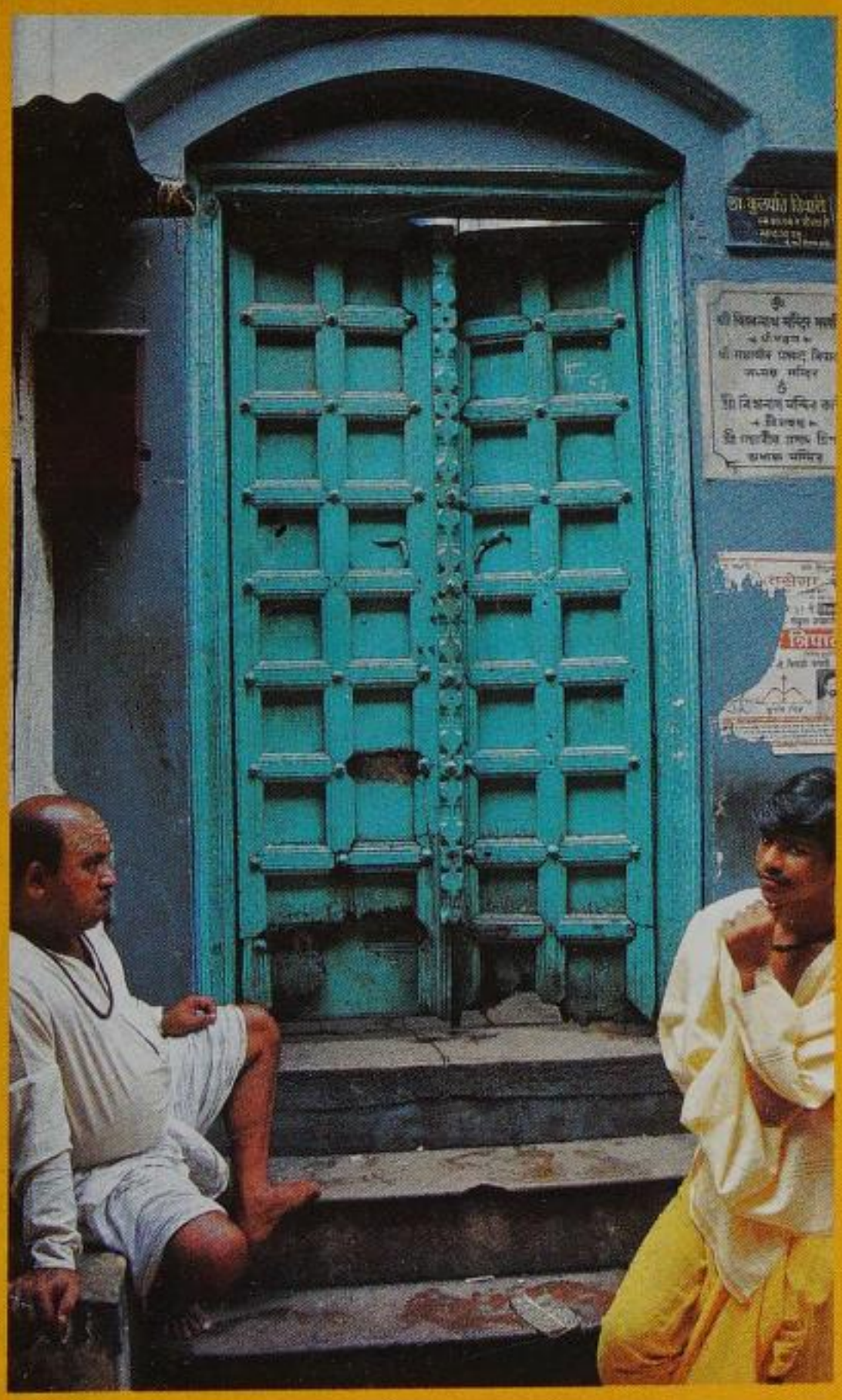




The Nawab of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah, spent his old age at Nawabgunj after being dethroned by the British and the *Khojas* or guards of the harem once lived in Khojwa Bazaar.

Even tribal heroes like Lahurabir and Bhojuvir have localities named after them. Some *mohallas* are named after lakes, ponds and wells, like Ramkund, Durgakund and Mansarovar.

The best way to explore these *galis* and *mohallas* is to wander aimlessly, getting a bit lost. In Varanasi, each lane you discover, each turn you take, promises serendipitous surprises.



Vishwanath Gali

The most famous *gali* in India leads to the Vishwanath Temple. The 500-metre long lane is lined with shops, small shrines and ramshackle boarding houses. The shops are a magical world of tempting merchandise. Lacquered wooden toys, religious paraphernalia in brass and copper, mounds of *sindur* (vermillion powder applied by married Hindu women in the parting of their hair), *attar* perfumes, musical instruments, glass and plastic bangles in rainbow hues,

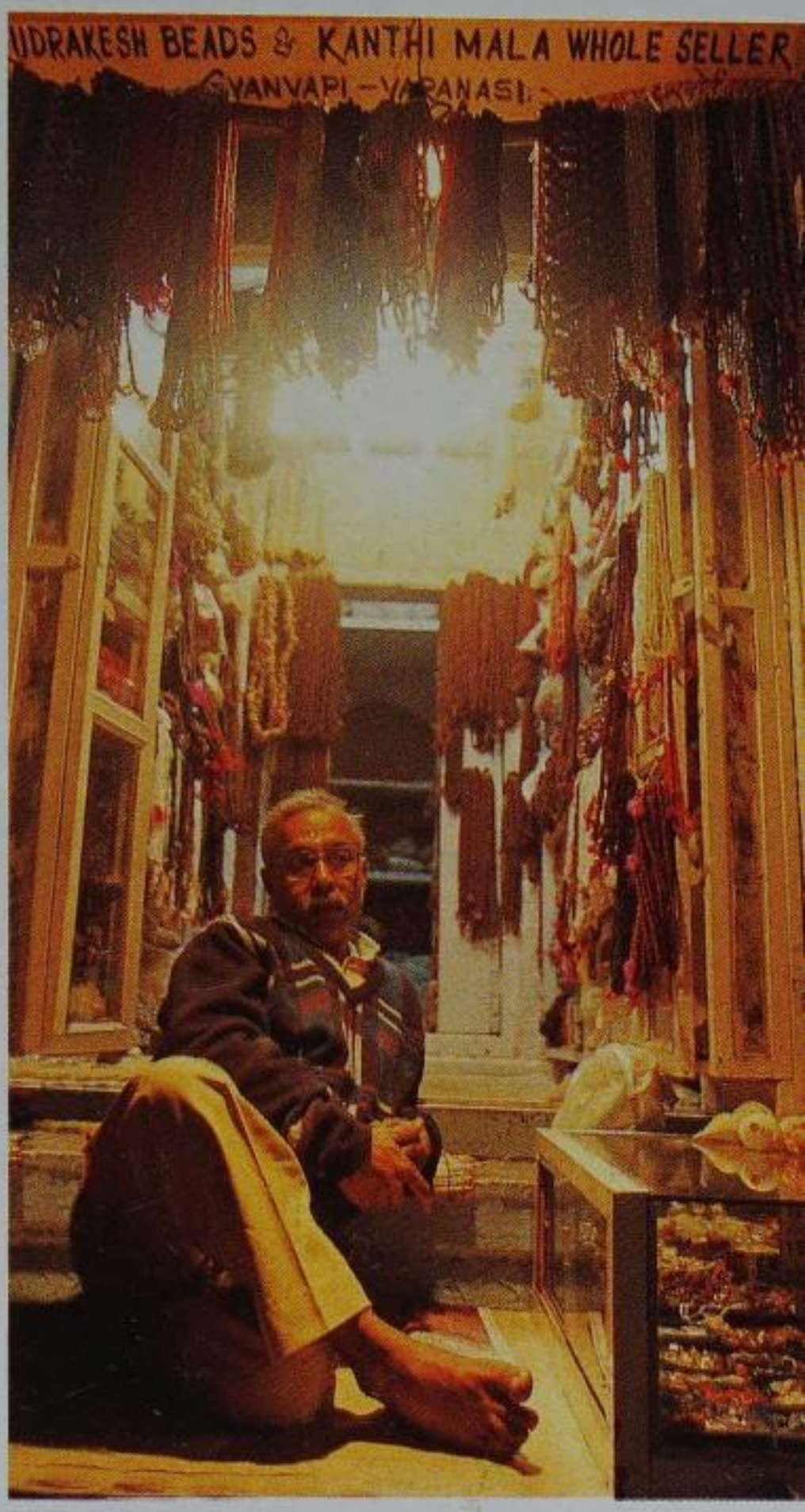
> ***There are four perils to be avoided in Kashi: widows, bulls, stairs and holy men.***
>
> **– popular saying**

dazzling sarees in silk and cotton, delicious snacks and sweets. Ritual objects, *ayurvedic* medicines and prayer beads. There are fascinating books on astrology, palmistry as well as sacred religious texts. There is never a dull moment in this ancient bazaar.

Kachauri Gali

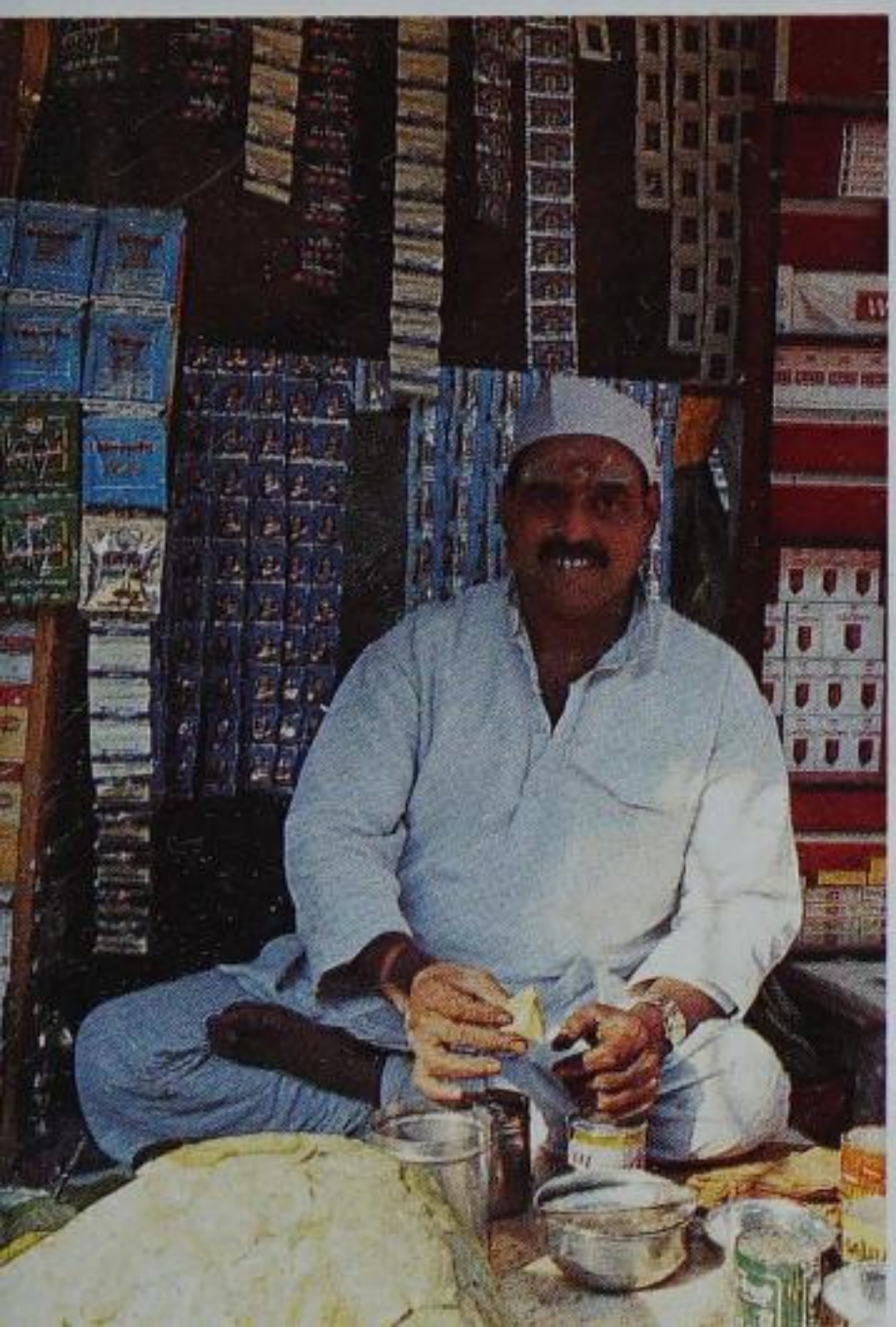
Close to the Vishwanath lane, near the Gyanvapi Mosque is Kachauri Gali. *Kachauri* is a popular snack and the shops here sell a mouthwatering array of food.

After their morning dip in the river and prayers at the temples, people breakfast in these shops. Hot, puffed *khasta kachauris*, stuffed with spicy lentils and served with a delicious potato curry are followed by crisp, syrupy *jalebis*. And the meal ends with a pungent Benarasi *paan*. It is said that breakfast at Kachauri Gali makes you feel you have attained temporary *moksha* or salvation.



Thatheri Bazaar

The narrow lane of Thatheri Bazaar has shops that sell brass and copper vessels for daily use and religious ceremonies, besides idols of gods and goddesses, lamps and other decorative artifacts. Here pilgrims buy the distinctive brass bowl with a spout and a lid to carry home the holy Ganga water. The shops in this lane also specialise in garments for idols of the gods, all spun from the finest silk and woven with gold and silver thread. The most popular idols are those of Lord Krishna, both as the flute-playing consort of Radha, and as baby Gopal with a ball of butter in his little fist.



Khoa Gali

Khoa is solidified milk used for preparing the famous Benarasi sweets. This *gali* sells different milk products like *khoa*, curd, cottage cheese and *ghee*. And the air in the lane is redolent with the aroma of milk.

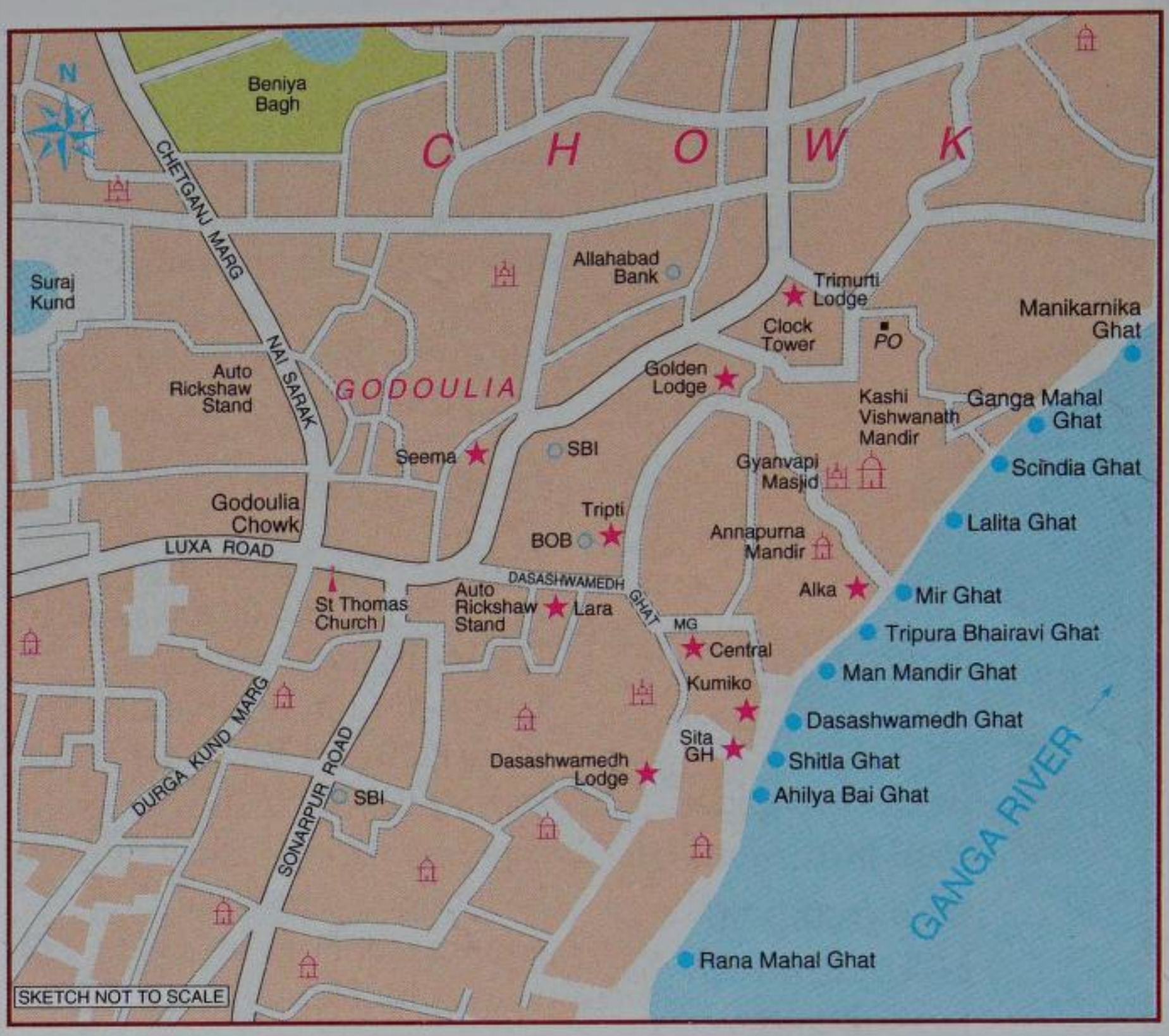
Satti Bazaar

Benarasi silk sarees are auctioned daily at this famous bazaar in the localities of Golghar, Lukkhi Chabutara, Kunj Gali and Ranikuan. The bazaar is a maze of wholesale and retail shops, most of them little pigeonholes only a few square feet large and over 150 years old. Here the *gadidars* or wholesalers buy sarees from the Muslim weavers who converge here from the fifty-four *puras* or residential quarters of Varanasi, carrying their wares in cardboard boxes.

> ***Benaras is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together!***
>
> **– Mark Twain, *Following the Equator*, 1896**

Phool Bazaar

The road south of Ramnagar pontoon bridge leads to the flower fields that supply Phool Bazaar, the flower market near Dasashwamedh Ghat. The flower-sellers sit behind piles of marigolds, lotuses, hibiscuses, rose petals and bright green *belpatra* and *tulsi* leaves that are bought by pilgrims as offerings for the gods at the temples.


N
Beniya Bagh
C H O W K
CHETGANJ MARG
NAI SARAK
Suraj Kund
Allahabad Bank
Trimurti Lodge
Clock Tower
PO
Manikarnika Ghat
Auto Rickshaw Stand
GODOULIA
Golden Lodge
Kashi Vishwanath Mandir
Ganga Mahal Ghat
Seema
SBI
Gyanvapi Masjid
Scindia Ghat
Godoulia Chowk
Tripti
BOB
Annapurna Mandir
Lalita Ghat
LUXA ROAD
DASASHWAMEDH GHAT
Alka
Mir Ghat
St Thomas Church
Auto Rickshaw Stand
Lara
MG
Central
Tripura Bhairavi Ghat
Kumiko
Man Mandir Ghat
DURGA KUND MARG
SONARPUR ROAD
Dasashwamedh Lodge
Sita GH
Dasashwamedh Ghat
Shitla Ghat
SBI
Ahilya Bai Ghat
GANGA RIVER
Rana Mahal Ghat
SKETCH NOT TO SCALE

॥ श्री माँ गंगा जी ॥

Kashmiriganj

Located behind Jawaharnagar Colony, near Khojwa Bazaar, is the market for the city's unique lacquered wooden toys and utensils, including pretty *sindur* boxes that are stacked in bright red rows.

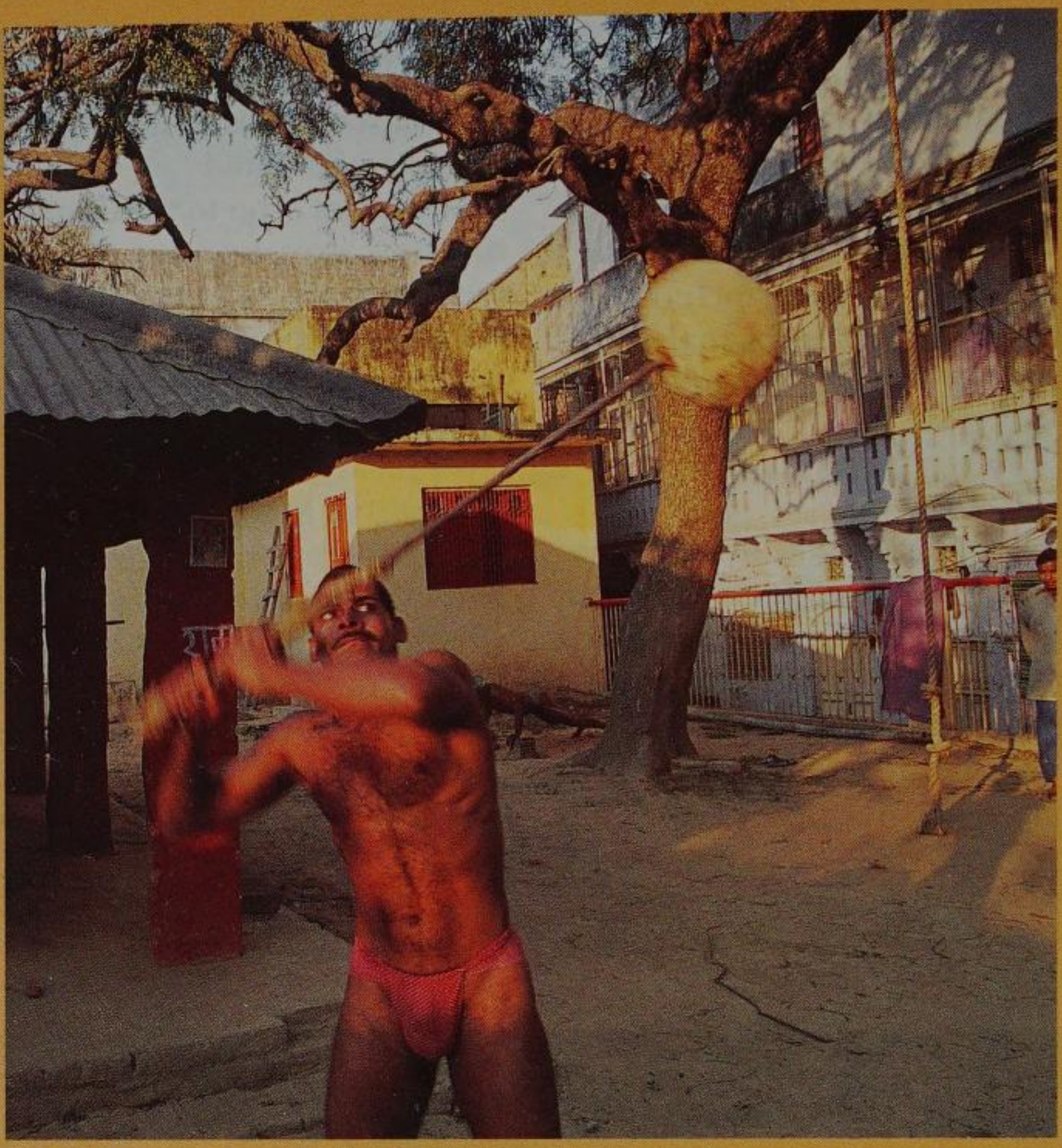
Devnathpura

Near the Bengali Tola live the potters who craft clay idols of deities. Row upon row of idols can be seen in various stages of creation and, around festivals like Dussehra, the area is a hive of activity.

Madanpura

The narrow lanes of the densely populated Madanpura echo to the clack of looms as men weave, women draw threads, fill up bobbins, and spin the yarn amidst cooking and tending children.

The *galis* of Madanpura are a kaleidoscope of colour; everywhere you will see shimmering silk skeins drying in the sun. And if you peep through the windows, you can see bright silk sarees stretched on the looms.



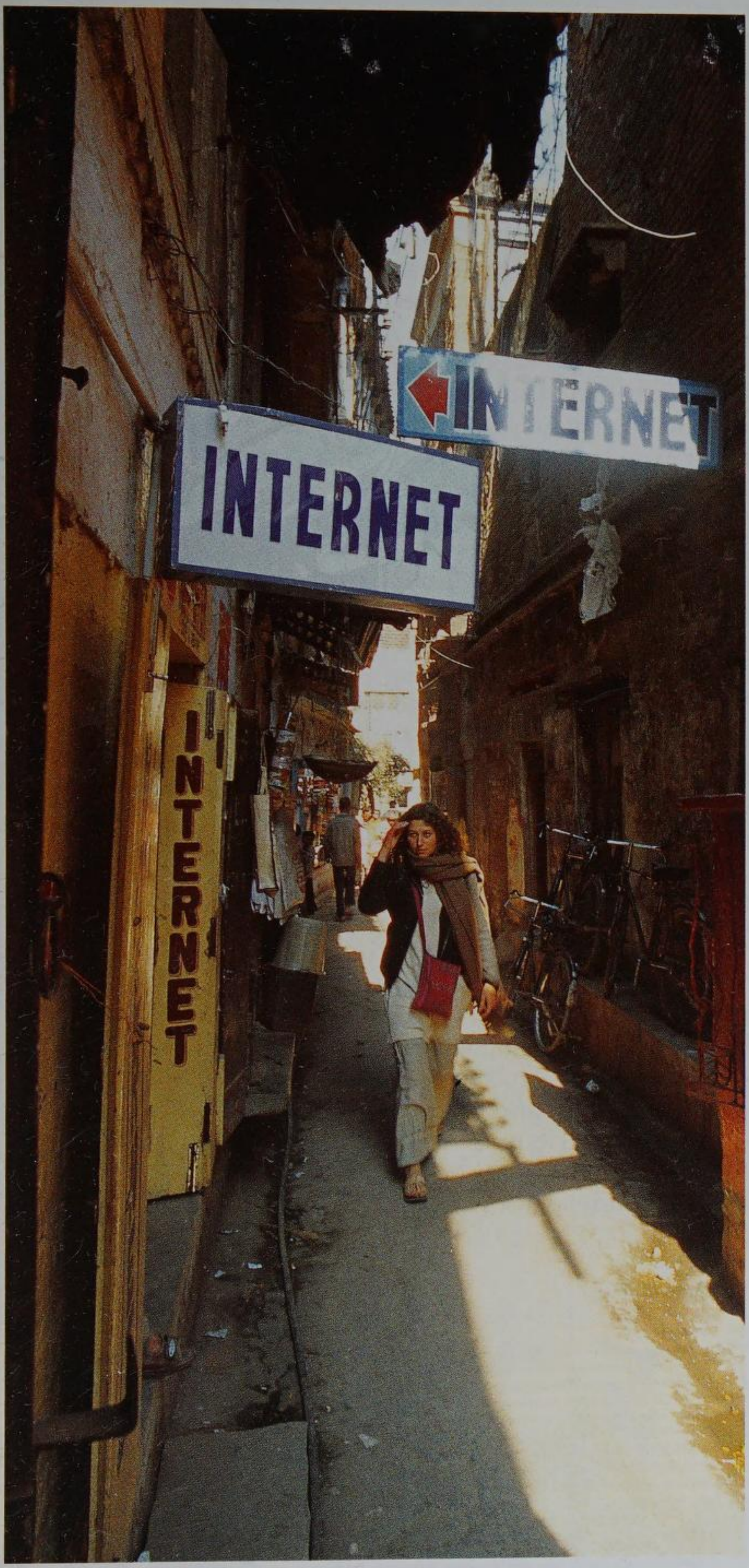
Akhara

Exercise, weight-lifting and wrestling are very popular with the local population and the *akhara* is their traditional gymnasium. In this egalitarian world, rich and poor, amateurs and professionals, all learn the intricacies of the sport from skilled *gurus*.

From sunrise on, you can see wrestlers grapple on the soft earth arenas, their muscular bodies glistening with oil. Star wrestlers and weight-lifters are local heroes. Hanuman Ghat is a popular hangout for the wrestlers of Varanasi.

Some of the well-known wrestling *akharas* are Ahir, Santram, Nagnath near Manikarnika, Adhin Singh near Ishwar Gangi, Angad and Bhikshu near Baitrani.

The religious centres or *maths* of various sects have their own *akharas*. Among the famous ones are the Niranjani, Nirvani and Juna Naga *akharas*. In the early twentieth century, these *akharas* became centres for resistance to colonial rule. The ascetics concentrated on exercise and physical fitness as they prepared for armed revolt against the British.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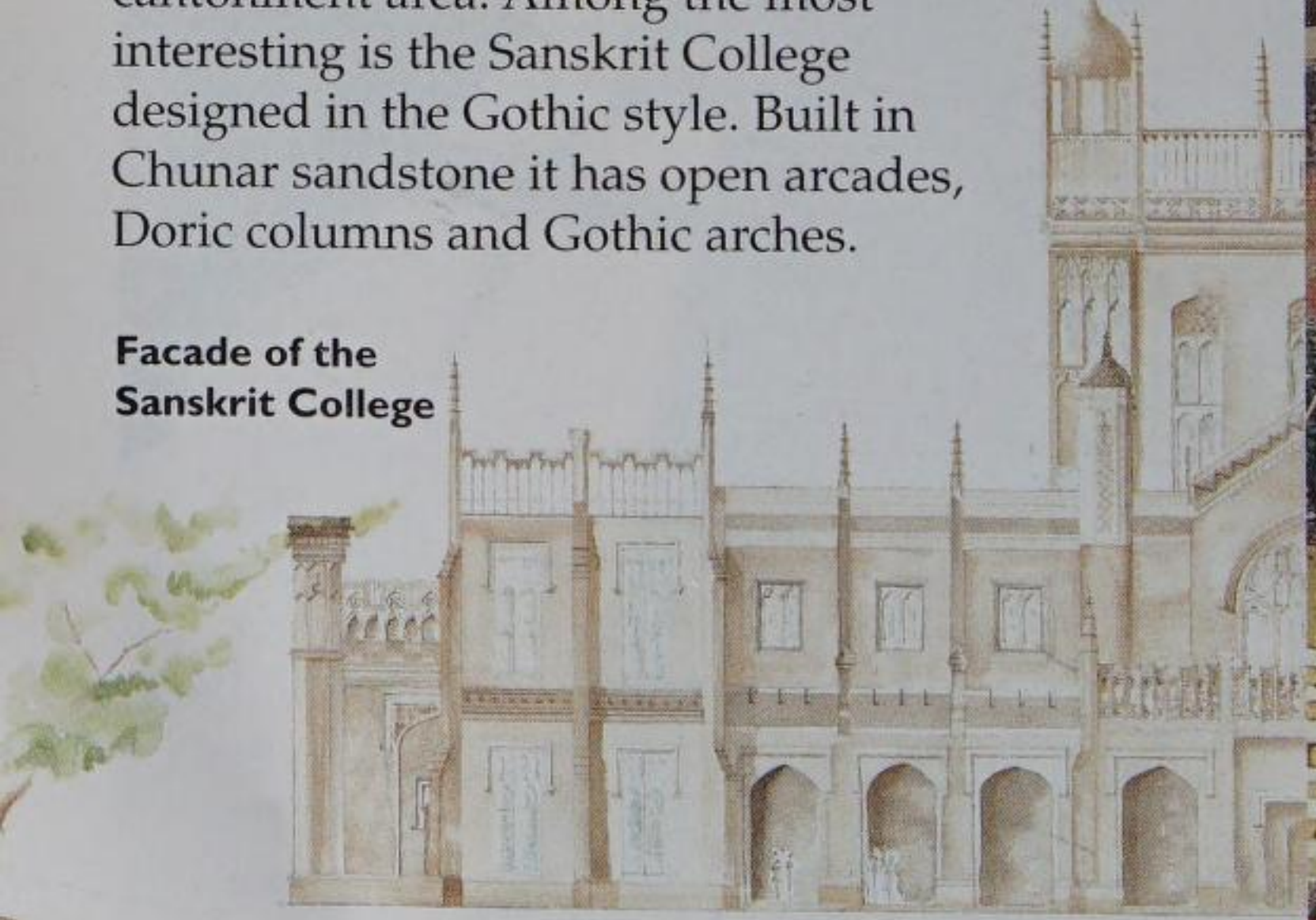
Minarets & Gothic Arches

Varanasi is not just a city of Hindu architecture. There are Mughal mosques and colonial buildings also to be seen among the temple spires and busy bazaars.

As a great centre of Hindu learning, Varanasi was always the target of Muslim attack during medieval times. And many of the mosques were built on sites of destroyed Hindu temples. During the tolerant reign of Emperor Akbar, Varanasi had a period of peace and many magnificent temples were built here. But by the reign of his great grandson, Aurangzeb, Varanasi was once again sacked and pillaged by Muslim bigots.

In the 17th century, Aurangzeb built Gyanvapi Mosque after sacking Vishwanath Temple and used material from the destroyed temple to build the mosque. Examples of Hindu carvings can still be seen on columns and doorways. Aurangzeb also built the towering Alamgir Mosque, that even today dominates Panchganga Ghat, after destroying the Bindumadhav Temple.

The Nawab of Awadh ceded Varanasi to the British in 1775. The colonial buildings are concentrated in the cantonment area. Among the most interesting is the Sanskrit College designed in the Gothic style. Built in Chunar sandstone it has open arcades, Doric columns and Gothic arches.



Facade of the Sanskrit College

Ramnagar

Sitting on the steps of Tulsi Ghat, looking across the river, you will see on the far bank the battered walls of Ramnagar Fort. A medieval silhouette of stone battlements and arched windows painted against the sky.

Ramnagar Fort, 14 kms from Varanasi, is a part of any guided tour of the city. This fort and its museum are the repository of the history of the kings of Benaras. Since the 18th century it has been the home of the Kashi Naresh, or the King of Kashi.

Varanasi was an important province of the Mughal empire. By the 18th century, the empire was rapidly disintegrating and during the reign of Mohammed Shah in the first quarter of the 18th century, the son of an ambitious landowner, Balwant Singh, assumed the title of the Raja of Benaras. He, however, ceded pre-eminence to the Nawab of Awadh, who in turn, paid nominal allegiance to the Mughal emperor in Delhi.

The Maharajas had a tumultuous relationship with the Nawabs of Awadh who ruled from Lucknow. They offered up revenue and troops and in return reaped the benefits of peace. In fact, the influence of the *nawabi* culture of Awadh lives on today, and is especially seen in the Benaras school of dance and music.

Taking advantage of the chaos born from disintegration of Mughal empire in the last quarter of the 18th century, the Rajas of Benaras also started striving for supremacy in their region.

A new centre of power arose with the advent of the East India Company and in 1775, Asaf-ud-Daula, the Nawab of Awadh, was forced to cede Varanasi to the British.

Then in 1910, Benaras was made a full-fledged state with its capital at Ramnagar and when India became independent in 1947, Benaras joined the Indian Union.

Even today the Kashi Naresh is deeply revered by the people of the city. He is the religious head of his people, who consider him a reincarnation of Lord Shiva. He is also the chief cultural patron and an essential part of all religious celebrations.

When the Dussehra festivities are inaugurated with a colourful pageant, he rides an elephant at the head of the procession. Then, resplendent in silk and brocade, he inaugurates the month-long folk theatre of *Ram Leela* at Ramnagar.

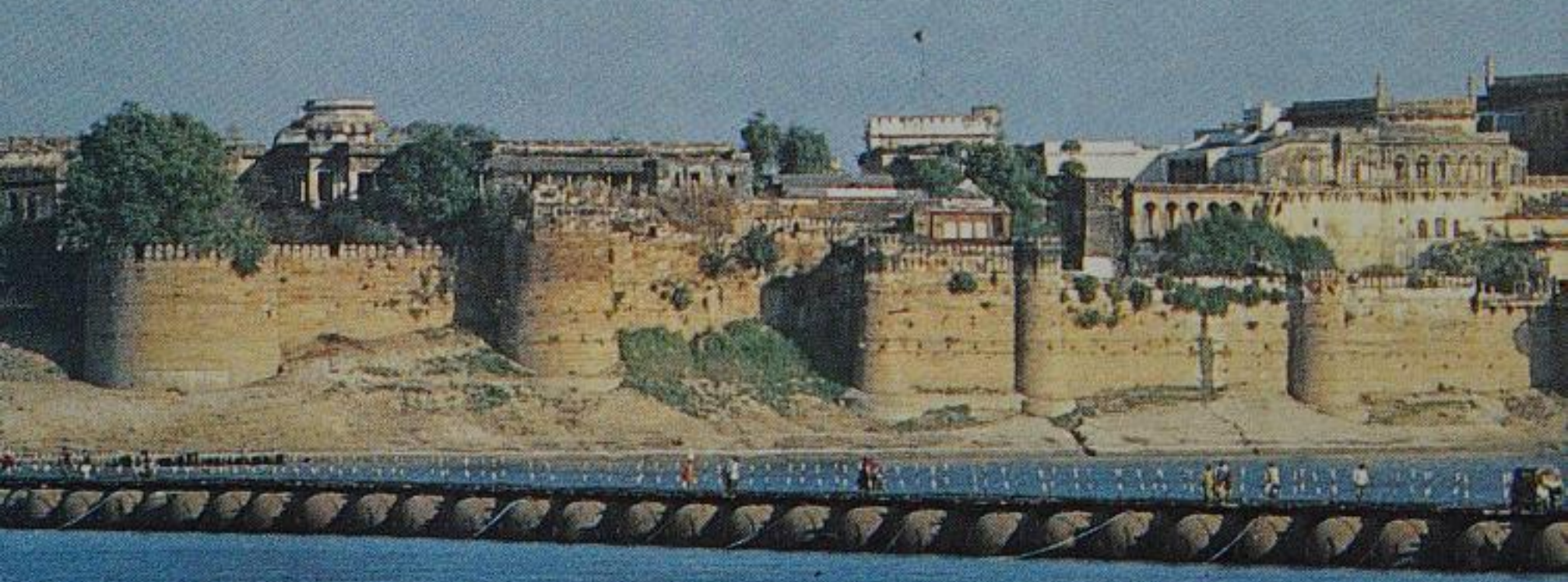
The *Ram Leela* is a cycle of plays that recounts the epic story of Lord Rama, as told in *Ramcharitamanas*, the version of the *Ramayana* penned by Tulsi Das.

The plays, sponsored by the Maharaja, are performed in Ramnagar every evening for 31 days.

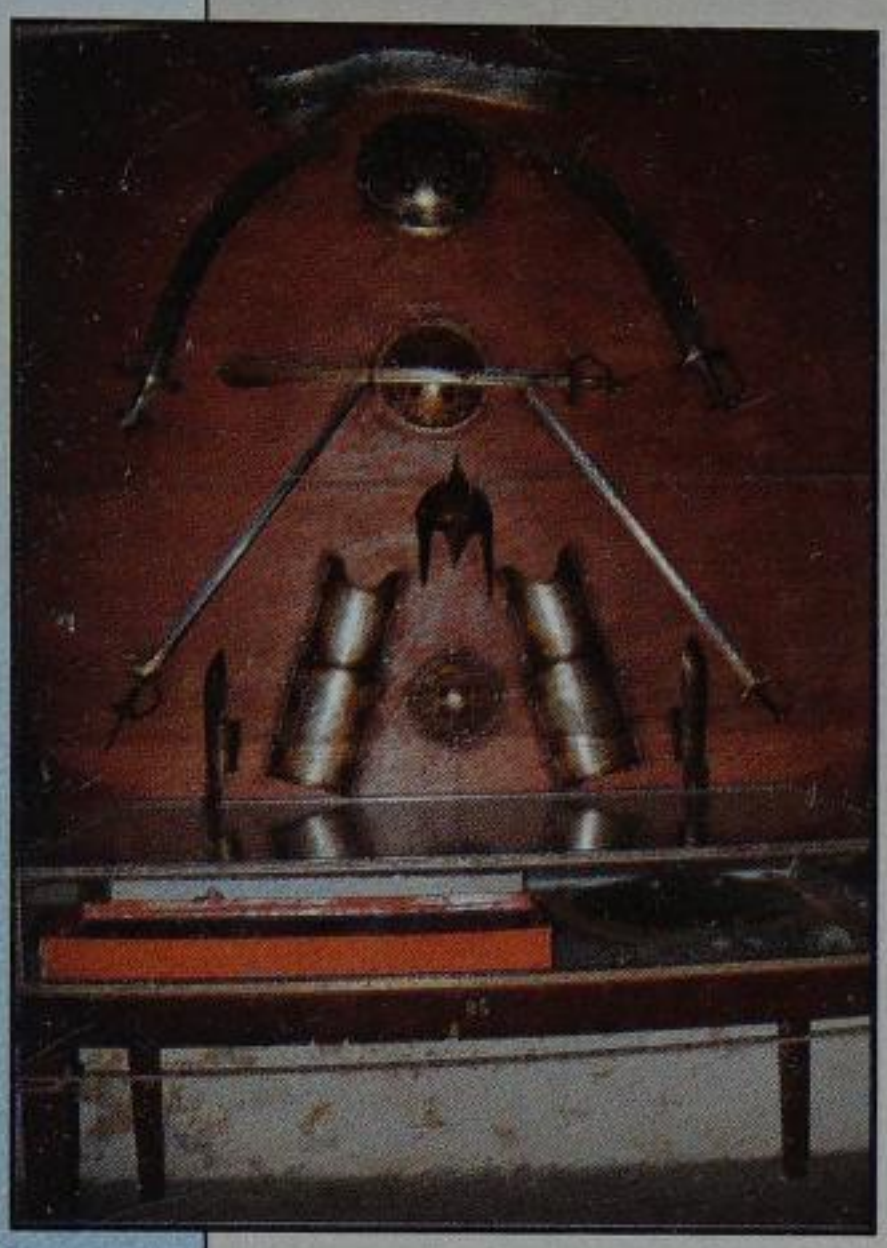
On the last day, the festivities reach a crescendo as Rama vanquishes the demon king Ravana. Maharaja Udit Narayan Singh started this tradition of staging the *Ram Leela* at Ramnagar in mid-19th century.

Built by Raja Balwant Singh with creamy *chunar* sandstone in the 18th century, Ramnagar Fort is typically Mughal, with carved balconies, open courtyards and picturesque pavilions.

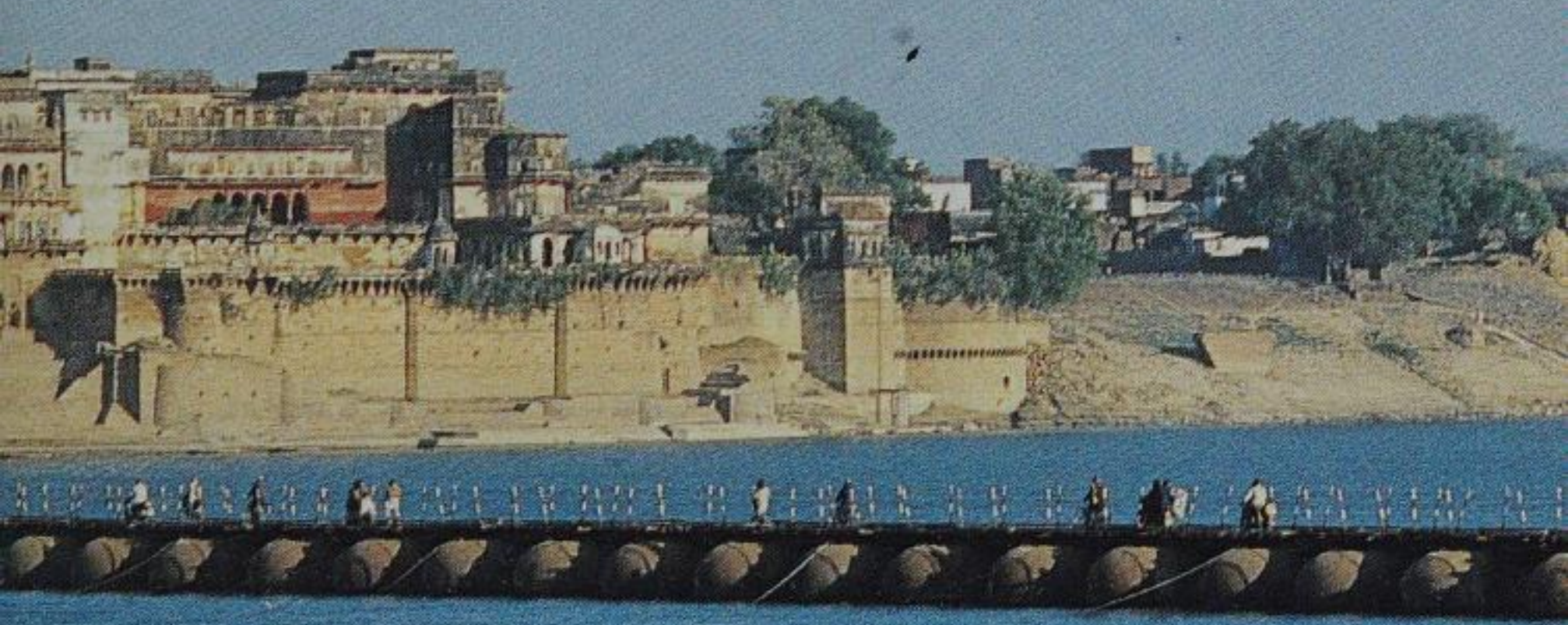
A large section of the fort is still the private domain of the royal family and not open to visitors. Wander around the corridors and see the excellent carvings on doors, windows and pillars.



The Vidya Mandir Museum, inside the Durbar Hall of the fort, is open on weekdays from 10 am to 5 pm. The decrepit building and the poor lighting inside the museum fail to show the exotic displays to full advantage. Take a look at the gold palanquin shaped like a lotus, the ornate hookahs, and the solid silver *howdahs* or elephant saddles and jewellery used to adorn the royal elephants.



There is a wide range of old armour matchlocks, swords and daggers. Among the many antique clocks is one that also shows the astrological periods. There is a fascinating display of medieval costumes, many of them in the famous *kimkhwab* brocade that is the finest product of the weavers of Varanasi.



Enjoy life without over-indulgence. Every Benarasi knows this....In Benaras we have everything: the comforts of life, good food, betel, brocades, and Ganga. What more could one ask ?

– **Maharaja of Kashi,** ***talking to photographer Pierre Toutain.***

A rare collection of manuscripts, especially religious writings, is housed in Saraswati Bhawan. It includes a precious handwritten manuscript by Tulsi Das. There are also many books illustrated in the Mughal miniature style, with beautifully designed covers.

Then there is the Vyasa Temple. According to a popular Puranic story, when Vyasa failed to get alms in Varanasi he put a curse on the city. Soon after, at a house where Parvati and Shiva had taken human form as householders, Vyasa was so pleased with the alms he received that he forgot his curse. However, because of his bad temper Shiva banished Vyasa from Varanasi. Resolved to be near at hand, Vyasa took his residence on the other side of the Ganga where his temple may still be seen at Ramnagar.

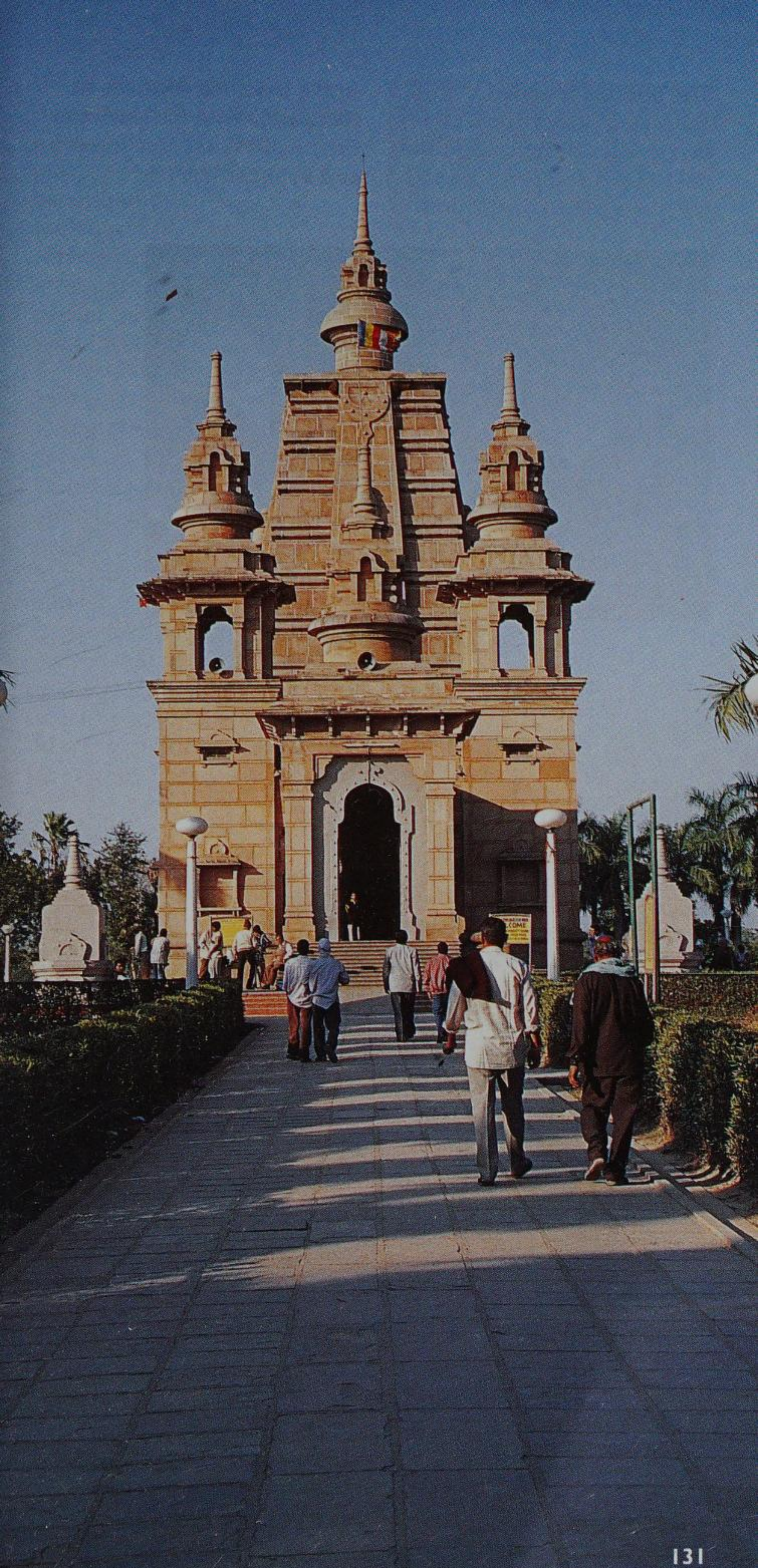
The best way to reach Ramnagar is by boat. Alternatively, you can take a rickshaw that will take you across the bridge. You can ask the rickshawala to wait or take a boat back or even walk back over the pontoon bridge.

Ramnagar Fort is open from
9 am to noon and from 2 pm to 5 pm

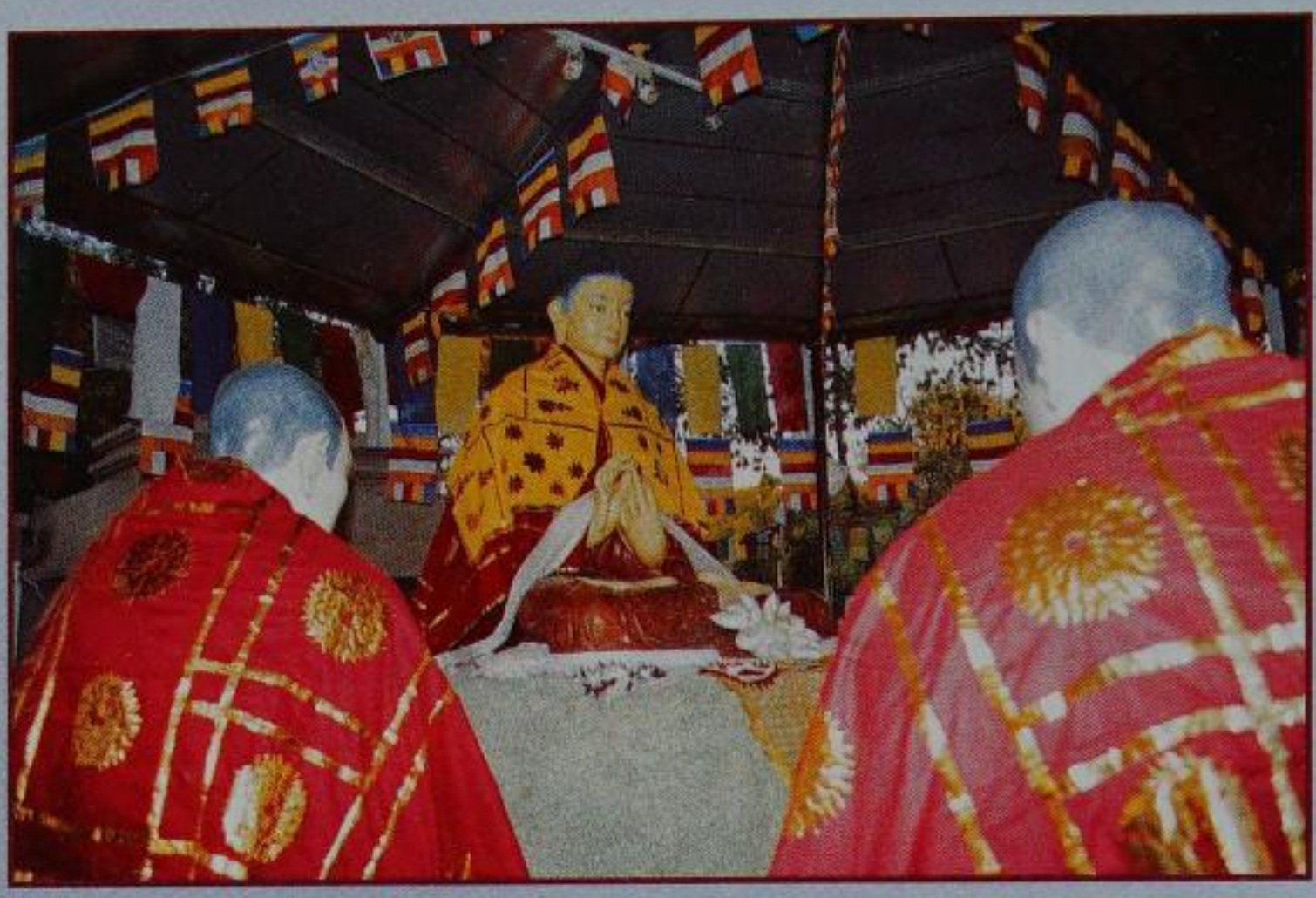
Sarnath

Gautama Buddha came to Varanasi 2,500 years ago, after gaining Enlightenment at Bodh Gaya. The sermon that he gave at the Deer Park on the outskirts of the city to his five followers, led to the foundation of a religion that has today spread across the world. This first sermon was called *Dharmachakrapravartana* or Turning of the Wheel of Law. In it, the Buddha explained the way to end suffering and gain supreme enlightenment or *nirvana*.

Today this park is called Sarnath. Though only 10 kms away from Varanasi, the two places are a study in contrasts. After frenetic Varanasi, Sarnath envelops you in peace. In the time of the Buddha, the place was called Rishipattana or Issipattana after the *rishis* or sages who came to meditate under its shady trees. Its other name was Mrigadaya or deer sanctuary, because a king of Varanasi had declared the land a sanctuary for deer. The modern name of Sarnath is derived from the name of the Bodhisattva Saranganatha.



The Buddha founded the *Sangha* or the holy order with his first five disciples. For the next 45 years, the Lord walked the dusty plains of northern India, touching the lives of thousands with his teachings. But he did not forget Sarnath and kept coming back.



When Emperor Ashoka converted to Buddhism in the third century BC, his patronage led to many beautiful buildings and a famous monastery being constructed here. One of the most famous remains of the period is the Ashoka Pillar, with its famous lion capital that was subsequently adopted as the official emblem of the Indian Republic.

Chinese travellers, Fa Hien and Hiuen Tsang, have left behind descriptions of Sarnath in its heyday. They say that some 1,500 monks lived in the monastery then and there was a *stupa* that was nearly 100 metres high. Pilgrims came to worship at the Bodhi tree that was grown from a sapling of the one in Bodh Gaya.

However, in the late 12th century, both Varanasi and Sarnath faced the first onslaught of Muslim invasions. After Qutbuddin Aibak's attack in 1194, the monastery lay in ruins, and Sarnath no longer echoed to the chants of the monks.

Seven hundred years later, in 1834, the British archaeologist, Alexander Cunningham, rediscovered Sarnath, opening a window to a forgotten period of India's ancient history.

Dhamekh Stupa

Dhamekh Stupa, a 33-metre high cylindrical tower, was possibly built around AD 500. It was raised over older structures and archaeological excavations have revealed brickwork from earlier periods. The borders have delicately carved geometrical and floral patterns, typical of the Gupta period.

Dharmarajika Stupa

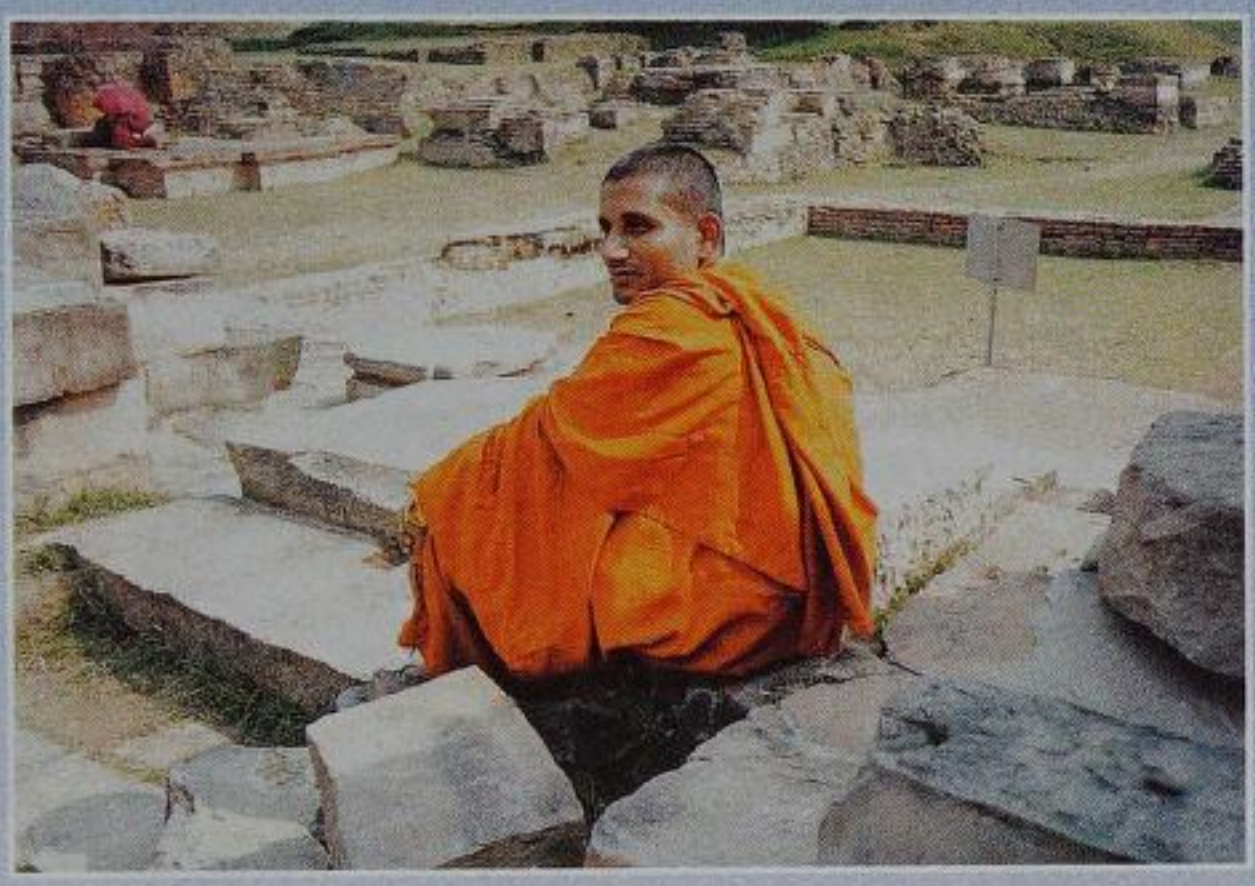
Emperor Ashoka built the Dharmarajika Stupa at the site where the Buddha gave his first sermon. It was broken down in the 18th century by an officer of the Maharaja of Benaras who was searching for building material for a bazaar. During his excavations, Cunningham found inside the *stupa* a marble casket that might have contained the relics of the Buddha.

Just behind the Dharmarajika Stupa are the remains of the Ashoka Pillar, one of the many that Emperor Ashoka erected. The monolithic pillar was once crowned with the magnificent lion capital that is now in the Sarnath Museum. The four roaring lions face the four cardinal directions symbolising the spread of the Buddha's teaching.

The Pillar was originally 15 metres tall and the lions supported a *dharmachakra* or the wheel of law but only a few fragments of it have been found. The inscription on it is a warning by Ashoka to the monks and nuns against creating schism within the *Sangha* or Order.

Mulgandhakuti Vihara

Mulgandhakuti marks the site where the Buddha meditated during his monsoon retreats or *vassavasa* at Sarnath. Excavations have unearthed a statue of a Bodhisattva from the 1st century AD.



A tablet was also found on which the name of the shrine was carved. In 1922, a temple, the Mulgandhakuti Vihara, was built here to enshrine the relics of the Buddha that were discovered at Taxila, now in neighbouring Pakistan.

The interior has lifesize murals painted by a Japanese artist between 1932-35. Outside is the Bodhi Tree and its spreading branches symbolise the return of Buddhism to India.

Chaukhandi

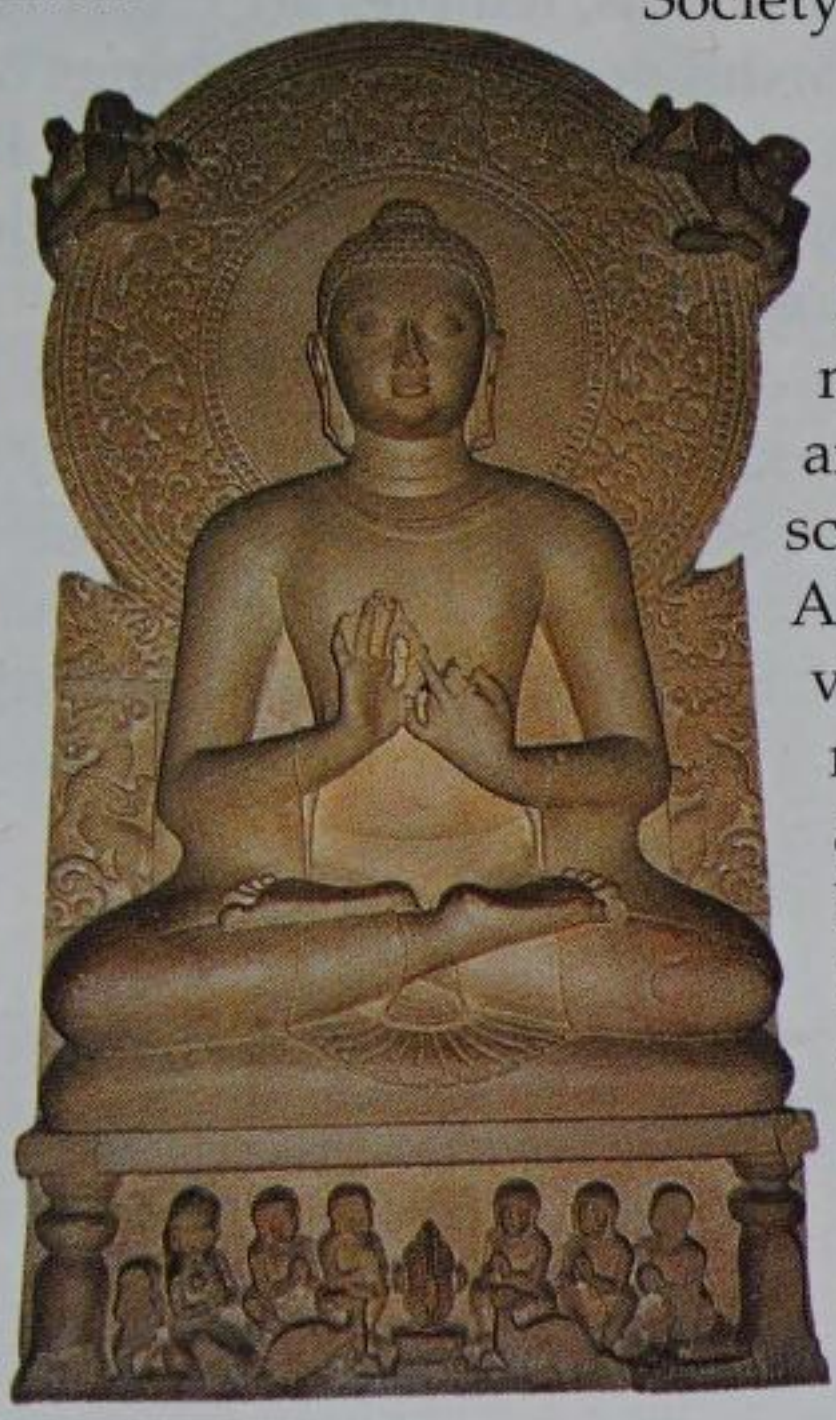
The first landmark visitors see on their way to Sarnath from Varanasi is a high mound with the remains of a brick *stupa* built in the Gupta period. The site, called Chaukhandi, marks the spot where the Buddha first met his five companions on arriving in Sarnath.

In 1588, Govardhan, a son of Raja Todar Mal, a prominent ally of Emperor Akbar, added an octagonal tower in the Mughal style to celebrate the emperor's visit to Varanasi.

Left:
Murals depicting scenes from the life of Lord Buddha, inside Mulgandhakuti Vihara

Sarnath Museum

The Sarnath Museum is a treasure trove of Buddhist sculpture, inscription and pottery. Some of the finest images of the Buddha and panels depicting important episodes from his life can be seen here. The largest collection is from the Gupta period, carved in the fine-grained Chunar sandstone.



The library of the Mahabodhi Society has an excellent collection of Buddhist literature, rare manuscripts and even some sculptures. Also worth visiting are the monasteries and temples built by other Buddhist countries in their indigenous architectural styles.

Festivals

Buddha Purnima, the full-moon night in May when the birth of the Buddha is celebrated, is the biggest annual festival at Sarnath. A big fair springs up on the occasion and the entire town celebrates with prayer meetings, group meditation and processions. During the first full-moon in November, monks and scholars commemorate the founding of Mulgandhakuti Vihara.

Festivals

Pageantry of Faith

On any given day in Varanasi, you can find a god, goddess, temple or *ghat* celebrating its special day. This colourful calendar of festivals, fairs and auspicious days gives Varanasi a perpetual air of celebration.

During festivals, temples are crowded with worshippers bearing offerings of flowers, lamps, sweets and incense. Fairs spring up, with makeshift stalls selling toys, trinkets, food and handicrafts.

We have given here the major festivals of Varanasi. The dates are likely to change from year to year, as Hindus use a lunar calendar. So if you are keen to see any particular festival, do check the date for that year.

नाम शिवाय:
"सूचना"
ये व सामानों की सुरक्षा स्वयं
ब्राह्मण जिम्मेदार नहीं होगा।
र साबुन लगाना व दातुन करना
बच्चे लाल तिवारी
महाराज

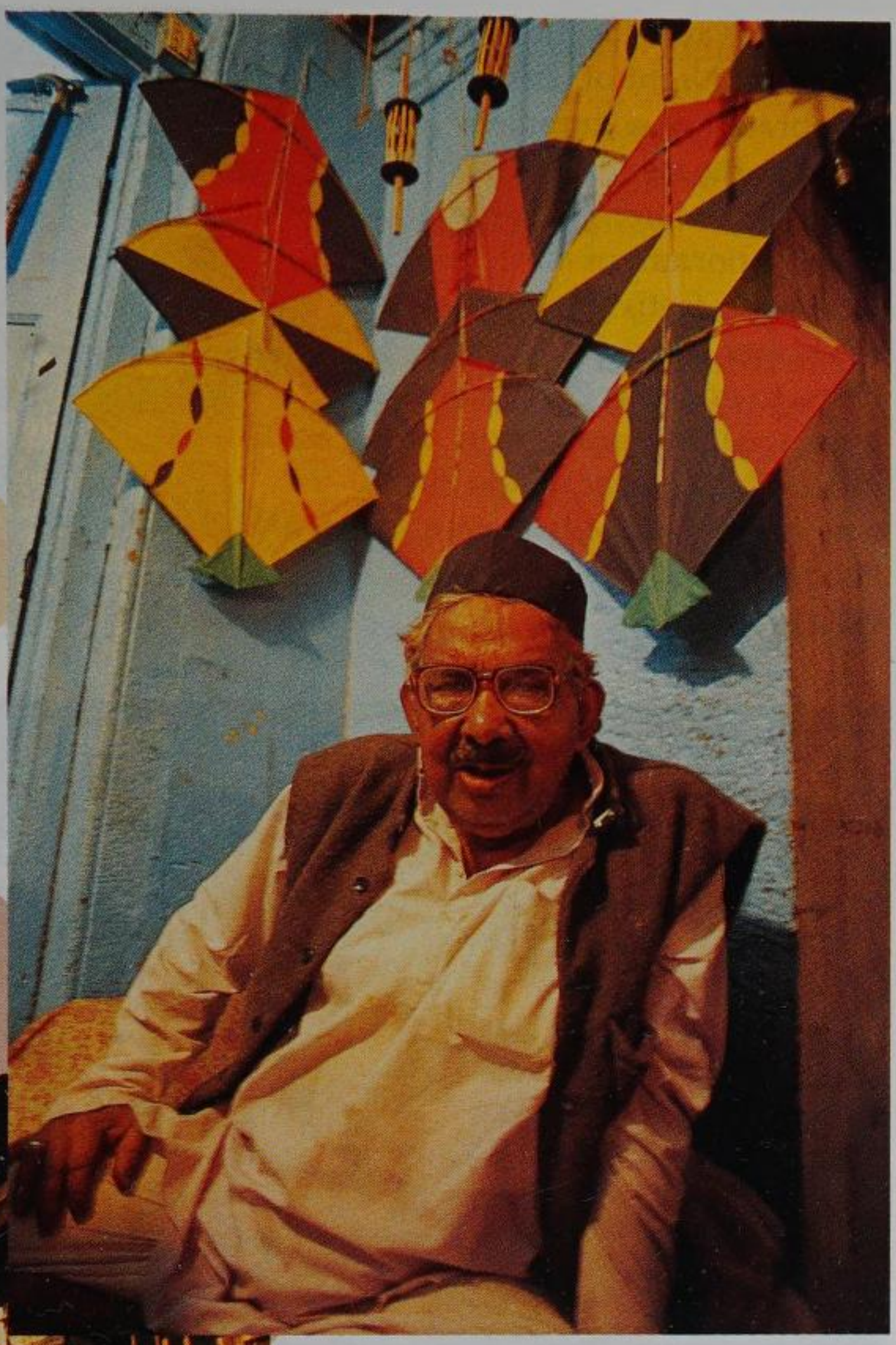
January – March

Makara Sankranti falls on a freezing January day, yet all the *ghats* are crowded with worshippers as it is a particularly auspicious day to bathe in the Ganga.

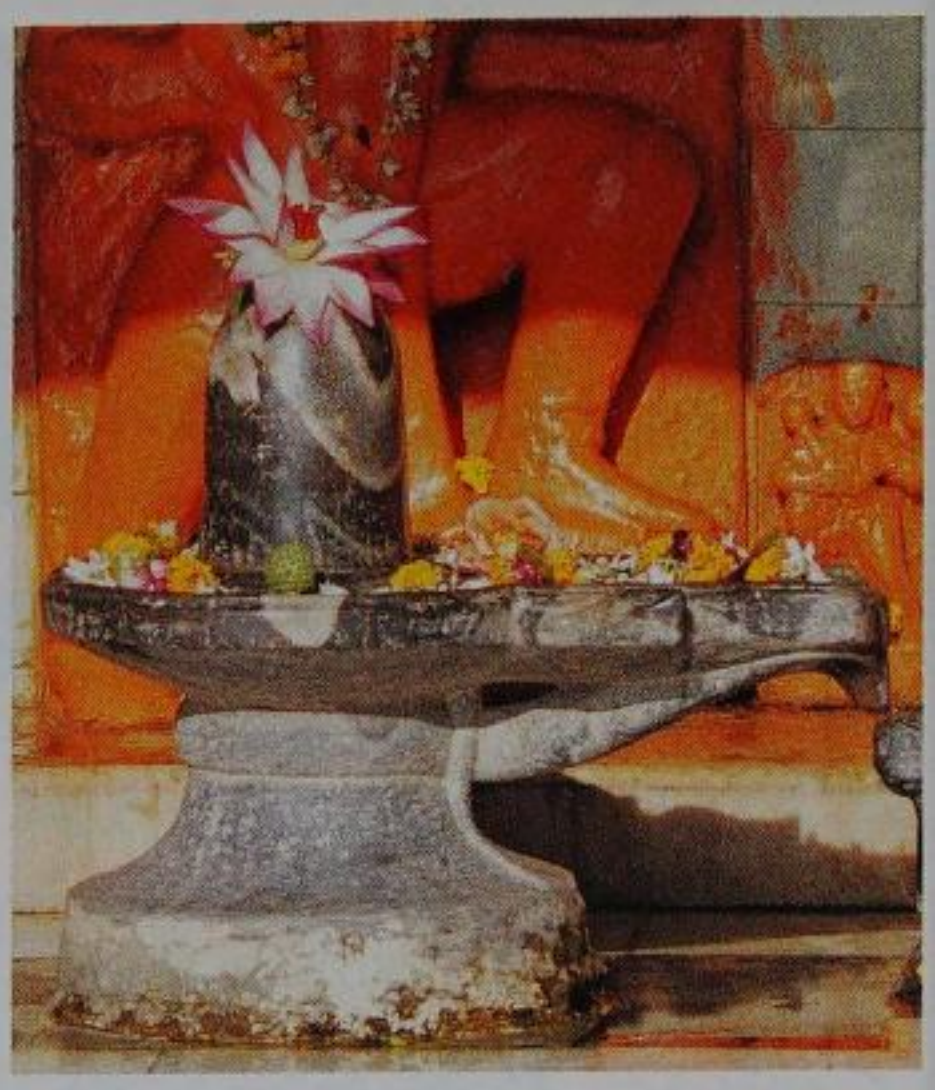
Local people celebrate the festival by eating *khhichri* (a rice and lentil dish) and a special sesame seed sweet. And the sky is dotted with colourful flying kites.

By late morning, every available open space is taken over by young men and boys excitedly battling over each others' kites. From the muddy river bank near Assi Ghat to the wide steps of the ghats, now almost emptied of the early morning bathers, to the many terraces in the Pukka Mahal, all ring with shrill cries of *Bhokatta*, as someone's kite is downed.

Basant Panchami celebrates the arrival of spring or *basant*. Women and children wear yellow clothes and offer yellow flowers, especially the first blossoms of the mango tree, to Saraswati, the goddess of learning and music.



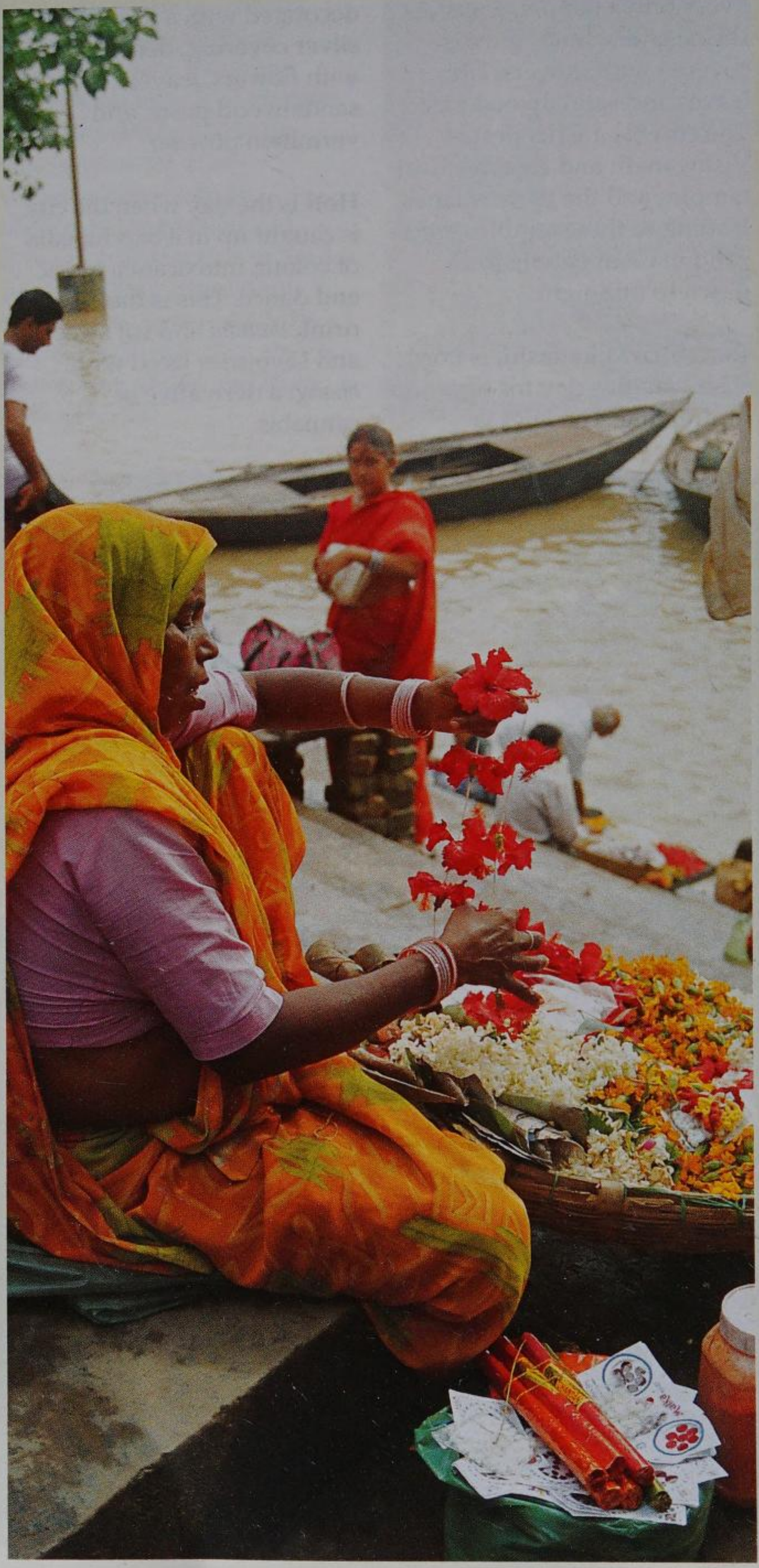
Mahashivaratri is, literally, the Great Night of Shiva. Celebrated on a moonless night in the month of *Phalgun* (February-March), it is the most important of all Varanasi's festivals. It celebrates the marriage of Shiva to goddess Parvati and a huge wedding procession called *Shiva Baraat* winds its way through the city's streets. People fast all day and keep vigil all night.



Every Shiva temple, wayside shrine and solitary *linga* is covered with flowers, *bilva* leaves and sandalwood paste. The crowds are deepest at Vishwanath and Kedareshwar temples and the narrow lanes leading to these temples are a solid mass of people from dawn to midnight.

Rangbhari Ekadashi, is Lord Vishwanath's day for *shringara* or dressing. The *linga* is decorated with a four-faced silver covering, decorated with flowers, leaves, sandalwood paste, and vermilion powder.

Holi is the day when the city is caught up in a bacchanalia of colour, intoxicants, music and dance. This is the day to drink *thandai* and eat sweets and savouries laced with *bhang*, a derivative of cannabis.



It is safer for visitors not to venture out on Holi as the revelry often gets out of hand. On this day, there is also a fair at Chausatti Ghat to honour the 64 yogini or female divinities particular to Varanasi.

April – June

As the dusty heat of summer begins, festivities subside. This is the time to worship the cool goddesses, Ganga, the river goddess and Shitala, the goddess of fevers.

The river is worshipped on **Ganga Saptami** when she descended to earth from heaven and on **Ganga Dashahara**, when she entered the plains. The people show their love for her by stringing garlands of flowers and trailing them across her waters.

In April falls the first **Navaratra**, the nine nights that honour the goddess Durga-Gauri. This is also the season when pilgrims perform the Panchkroshi Yatra.

The city of Tulsi Das celebrates the birth of Lord Rama on **Ramnavami** with 24-hour readings from his epic, *Ramcharitmanas*.

Id-ul-Fitr marks the end of Ramzan, a month of fasting for the devout Muslim. People celebrate with new clothes and special food.

Later, on **Muharram**, Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain by parading *tazias* or paper-and-tinsel replicas of the holy tomb at Karbala.

Cultural Festivals

In recent years, a number of cultural festivals and handicraft fairs have come to be organised in Varanasi. For the exact dates of these festivals, contact UP Government Tourist Office, Parade Kothi, Cantonment.

Ganga Mahotsav: Festivities on the riverfront – November

Buddha Mahotsav: Celebrating the Birth, Enlightenment and Parinirvana of Lord Buddha at Sarnath –April/May

Dhrupad Mela: A three-day festival of Classical Hindustani Music at Tulsi Ghat – March/April

Ganga Water Rally: Annual water rally from Allahabad to Varanasi. The closing ceremony takes place at Raj Ghat – February

July – September

The rainy months are a period of spiritual retreat, especially significant for Buddhists. Traditionally, the itinerant monks come to Sarnath during the monsoons to stay in the temples and monasteries there.

This is also the time Hindus perform **Prayaschita**, the rites of atonement for the sins of the past year at the *ghats*, followed by a cleansing dip in the river.

Then come festivals of two of the most loved gods of the Hindu pantheon. On **Ganesh Chaturthi** the benign elephant-headed god of prosperity is worshipped, while **Janamashtami** is the birthday of Lord Krishna. On this day, temples resound to chants and people decorate their homes with tableaux depicting scenes from Krishna's life.

Bakr Id, the feast of sacrifice, is celebrated by Muslims with great fervour usually in this season. After prayers at the mosques people go to each others homes and celebrate the occasion with joyous feasting.

October – December

The fortnight of the **Pitripaksha**, dedicated to the worship of ancestors, has great religious significance for Hindus at Varanasi. Pilgrims perform *shraddha*, the funeral rites at the *ghats* for those family members who have died during the past year.

At the end of *pitripaksha*, starts the five-day **Durga Puja** celebrated mainly by Bengalis. Clay images of Goddess Durga are worshipped to the chant of prayers and the beating of drums. The first Durga Puja outside Bengal was celebrated in Varanasi in 1773.

On **Deepavali** or **Diwali,** the city is transformed into a fairyland of golden lights. The day commemorates the return of Lord Rama to Ayodhya with his wife, Sita and brother, Laxman, after fourteen years in exile. On a moonless night of Kartik, balconies, temples and *ghats* glow with lamps. On this day Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, is welcomed into newly-cleaned homes and businessmen begin new account books.

Through the month of Kartik, *akash deeps* (literally sky lamps) are lit on Panchganga Ghat. These are earthenware lamps on bamboo poles raised skyward by widows to show their husbands the way to heaven. On **Kartik Purnima**, the full moon night, a tall pillar, the *Deephajara Sthambha* holding a thousand lamps, is lit on top of the *ghat*.

Kartik Purnima is also celebrated as **Dev Diwali**, literally Diwali for the gods, when the *ghats* of Varanasi are decorated with thousands of oil lamps.

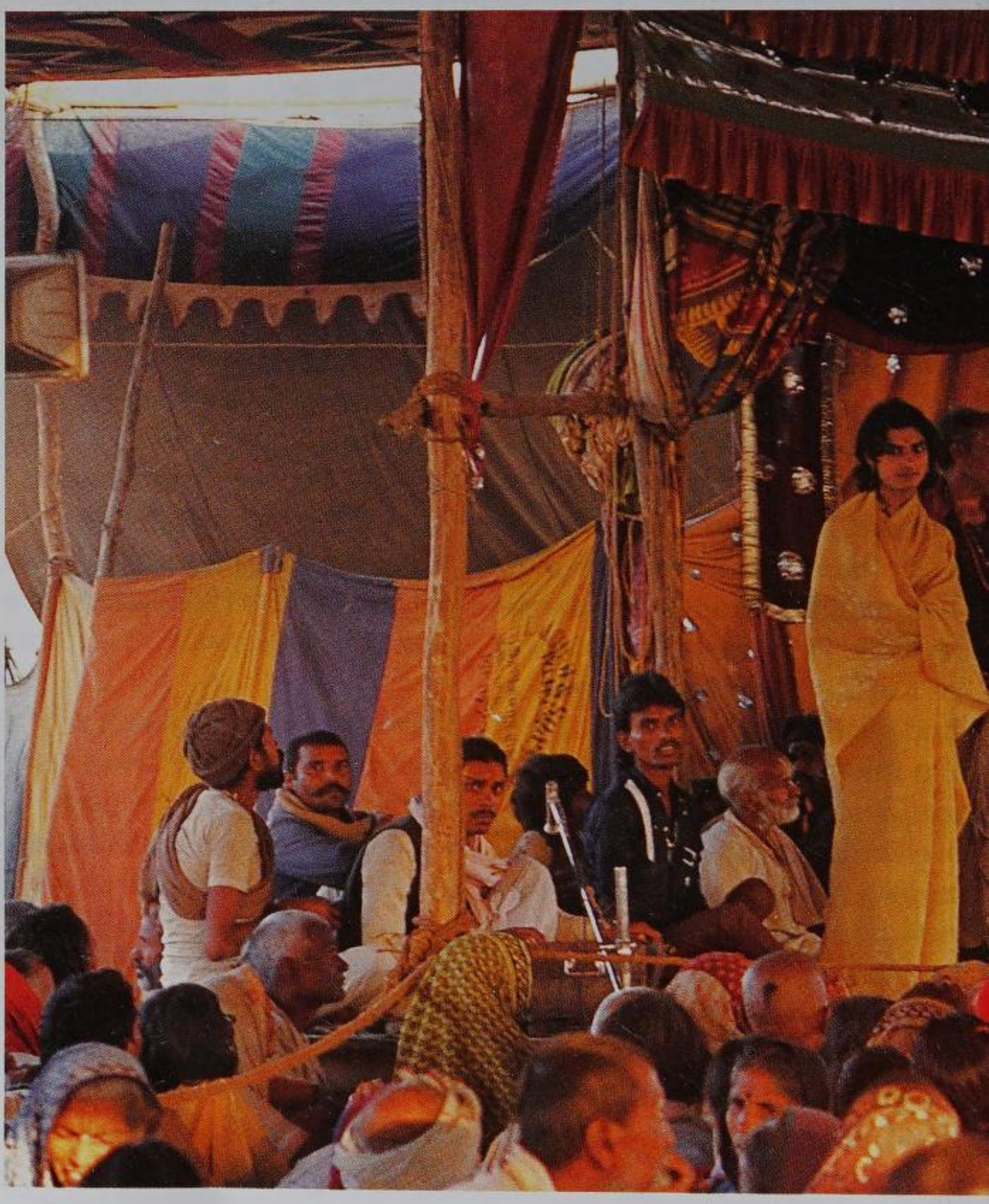
Nag Nathaiya at Tulsi Ghat is part of the 20-day long Krishna Leela, celebrating the exploits of Lord Krishna.

Ram Leela

During the nine nights of Navaratra, in October, people watch the folk theatre of the Ram Leela that tells the story of the *Ramayana*. Varanasi's oldest is the Adi Ramleela performed at Lat Bhairav. This performance has no dialogue, just a series of pageants called *jhankis*.

The most famous Ram Leela is the month-long one held at Ramnagar. It is based on Tulsi Das' version, *Ramcharitmanas.* This elaborate folk theatre has, over the years, acquired the sanctity of a religious ritual. Traditionally patronised by the Raja of Kashi, the state government has of late stepped in with financial support.

The performance begins on Anant Chaturdashi and the scenes are enacted in a series of sets constructed across the town and the audience moves with the play. Thus major episodes from the *Ramayana*, like Ram Janamotsav (the birth of Lord Rama) and Dhanush Bhang (Rama's stringing of the Shiva's bow to win princess Sita), are

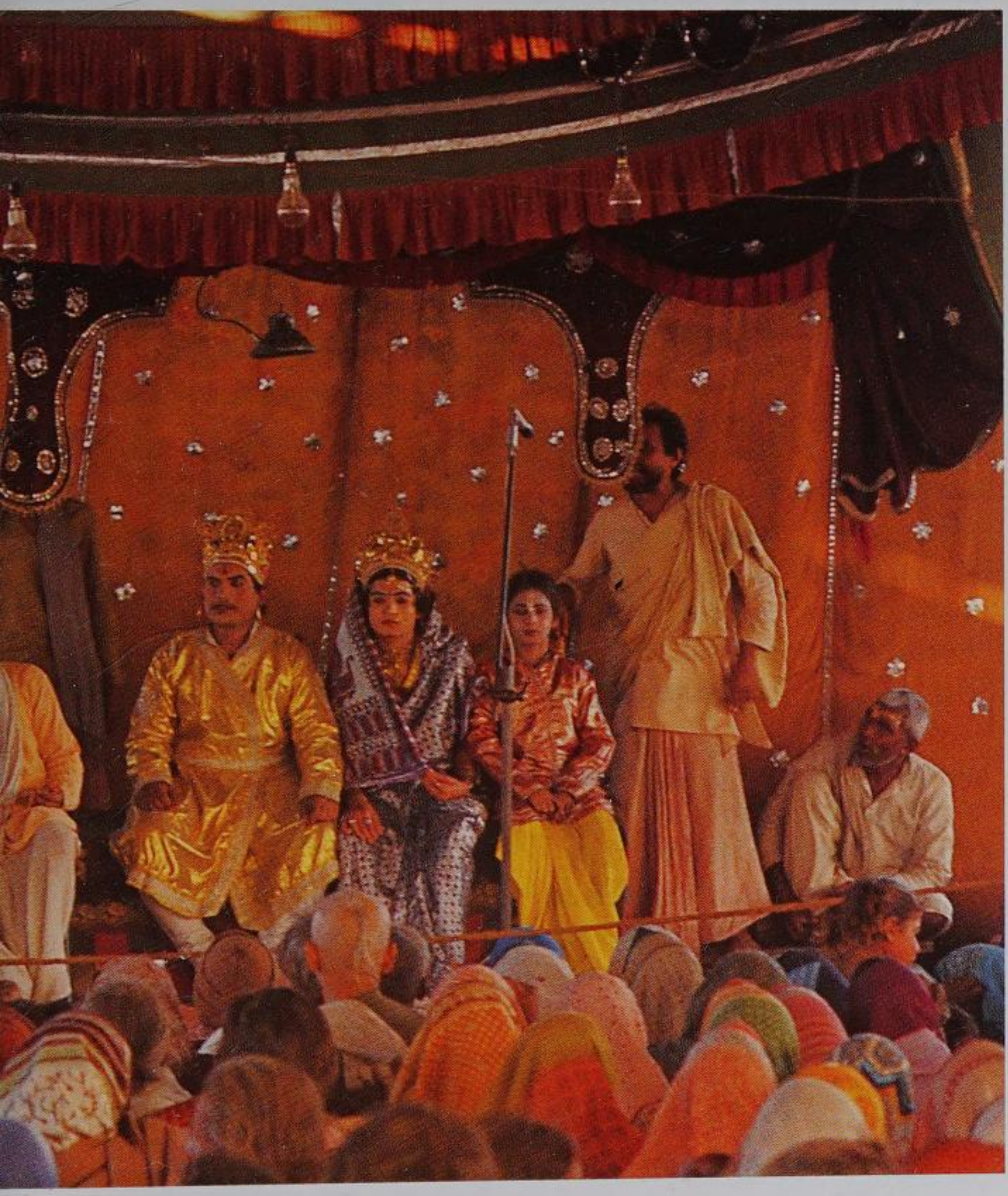


performed at different sites. Over 30 days the Ram Leela moves over 24 kms. The actors in their dazzling costumes, elaborate make-up and *papier mache* masks recreate a story the audience knows by heart and forever enjoys.

On **Dussehra**, even as images of goddess Durga are immersed in the river, giant effigies of the demon king Ravana, his brother Kumbhakarna and son Meghnad are blown up in a sparkling shower of fireworks.

Kashi's present life reaches back to the 6th century BC in a continuous tradition. If we could imagine the silent Acropolis and the Agora of Athens still alive with the intellectual, cultural and ritual traditions of classical Greece, we might glimpse the remarkable tenacity of the life of Kashi.

– Diana Eck,
***Benaras: City of Light*, 1983**



Traditional Calendars

Both Muslim and Hindu festivals are calculated by the lunar calendar. So, the dates change every year. When looking for the dates of Hindu festivals these are some of the words you will encounter:

Tithi	lunar day
Vaar	solar day
Paksha	lunar fortnight
Krishna paksha	waning moon
Shukla paksha	waxing moon
Purnima	full moon
Amavasya	moonless night

The religious Hindu dates are calculated according to the Vikram Samvat calendar that begins from 57 BC. The official Indian calendar is the Saka Era that began in 78 AD.

Festival
Paush Purnima
Makara Sankranti
Mauni Amavasya
Magh Purnima
Ganga Water Rally
Dhrupad Mela
Mahashivaratri
Navaratra (Chaitra)
Ramnavami
Sankat Mochan Music Festival
Buddha Purnima
Ganga Dashahara
Ram Leela
Dhanush Yagya
Ram Vivah
Nakkataiya
Pitrivisarjan
Navaratra (Ashwin)
Vijaya Dashami/Dussehra

Hindu Months

Baisakh	Apr – May
Jyeshtha	May – June
Ashara	June – July
Shravana	July – Aug
Bhadra	Aug – Sept
Ashvin	Sept – Oct
Kartik	Oct – Nov
Agrahayana	Nov – Dec
Paush	Dec – Jan
Magh	Jan – Feb
Phalguna	Feb – Mar
Chaitra	Mar – Apr

2002		2003		Venue
12	January	18	January	Ghats
14	January	14	January	Ghats
12	February	1	February	Ghats
27	February	16	February	Ghats & Ravidas Mandir
6-8	February	6-8	February	Ghats
9-11	March	27	Feb -1 March	Tulsi Ghat
13	March	1	March	Ghats &Temples
13-21	April	2-11	April	Ghats &Temples
21	April	10	April	Tulsi Manas Mandir & Ghats
1-5	May	20-24	April	Sankat Mochan Mandir
26	May	15	May	Sarnath
20	June	10	June	Ghats
20	Sept - 20 Oct	9	Sept - 9 Oct	Ramnagar
24	September	12	September	Ramnagar
25	September	14	September	Ramnagar
4	October	24	September	Ramnagar
6	October	26	September	Ghats
7-14	October	26	Sept - 4 Oct	Ghats & Temples
15	October	5	October	DLW Vidyapeeth, Ramnagar

Crafts

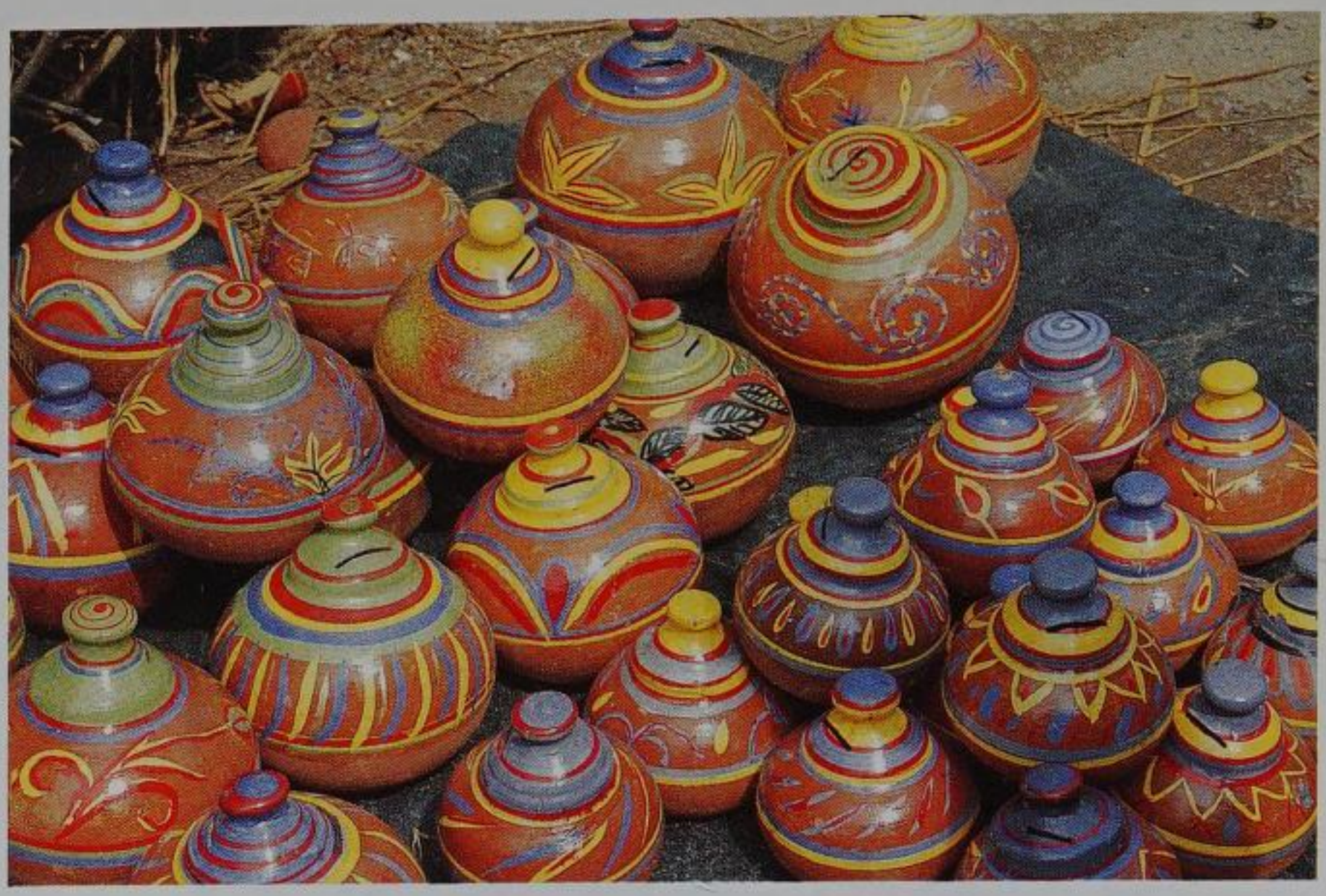
The Colours of Life

The crafts of Kashi are a reflection of its many-hued culture. The life and work of the craftsmen of Kashi are deeply entwined with the social and religious life of the city. On auspicious days and on festivals, toy-makers, basket-weavers and metal-workers all set up colourful stalls in the city.

At these impromptu *melas* or fairs, you will find a tempting range of items made of terracotta, wood and paper. With them, you will also find lively *papier mache* masks, household articles in metal and many, many decorative items. Kashi's traditional crafts are all made from freely available local material and are all environment-friendly.

Commerce had as many pilgrims as religion.
All along the shores of the venerable stream lay
great fleets of vessels laden with rich merchandise.
From the looms of Benaras went forth the most
delicate silks that adorned the ballrooms of
St James and of Versailles...

– Thomas Babbington Macaulay, 18th century



Pottery

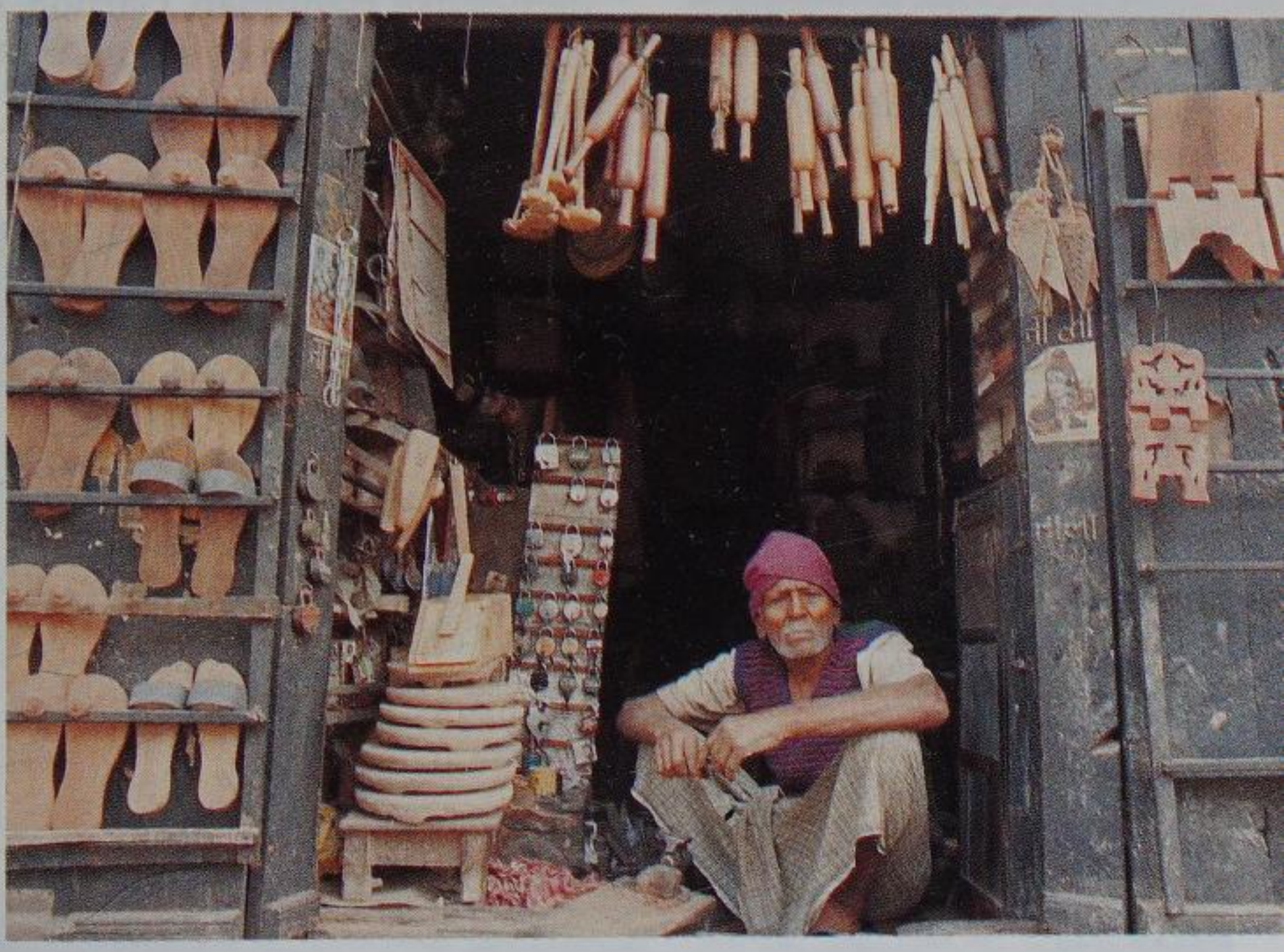
Archaeological excavations at Raj Ghat have proved that pottery was a fine local skill even in the time of the ancient Aryans. The local potter will tell you that clay from the banks of the Ganga is ideal for earthenware. There is a popular belief that pottery from here should not be bought by outsiders as the earth of Varanasi should not be taken away beyond its boundaries.

Toys, an endless variety of birds, animal and human figures, are both shaped by hand and made with moulds. Then they are dried, fired in the kiln and painted. Some toys used for religious rituals are not baked but just sun-dried and then painted.

The people of Varanasi pay tribute to the humble potter in the month of *Bhadra* (August/ September), when a 16-day fair called *Sorahaiya ka Mela* is held at Lakshmi Kund exclusively for the potters of Kashi.

Wooden Toys

The wooden toys of Varanasi have always been popular with pilgrims and travellers. They are either hand-carved or turned on lathes. Among the favourite figures are those of Ganesh, Hanuman, Krishna, Ravana and other deities and demons from the Hindu pantheon, as well as birds and animals. Bright red *sindoor* containers in different shapes and sizes are also very popular.



Hindu weddings in Varanasi are incomplete without the *marwa*, the wooden tree of life and wooden bowls used during the *yajna* or fire ceremony. These wooden trees can be seen at all the *bazaars* of the city, especially during the auspicious months when most Hindu weddings take place.

Traditional Paintings

Kashi has a vibrant tradition of miniature and folk painting and, even today, the outer walls and doorways of houses are covered with eye-catching paintings, while murals decorate interiors. For the people, the *kumbha* or the folk painter is a part of their family festivities. The painters decorate houses before festivals and weddings with auspicious motifs like fish, parrots, peacocks and banana trees. These artists also paint the *kohbar* or the marriage chamber, which is ritually decorated with auspicious signs and symbols, as well as narrative murals.

Other Crafts

The animated, brightly-coloured *papier mache* masks of Hindu deities like Hanuman, Garuda and Ravana worn by Ram Leela actors all over the country are also typical of Kashi.

Jewellery

The jewellers of Kashi are famous for their fine craftsmanship in gold and silver.

But the exquisite craft unique to this city is the pink enamelling or *gulabi meenakari*. The finest creations are enamelled bangles with elephant, tiger and crocodile heads, set with gems.

The intricate enamel patterns closely replicate the textile designs native to Varanasi, with *ambis* or the mango shape, paisleys and peacocks being the most frequently used.

The bamboo umbrellas that give the Varanasi *ghats* their distinctive character are made by the local bamboo craftsmen who also make and sell baskets, boxes, bird cages, mats and toy bows-and-arrows, that are available in the shops above Dasashwamedh Ghat.

The artisans working with bell metal, copper and brass, the *kaseras* and *thatheras,* traditionally operate from the Thatheri Gali. Brass and bell metalware can be seen stacked in glowing rows in the main *bazaars* especially in Vishwanath Gali.

Silk

Varanasi is a synthesis of many influences – like the merging of the waters of the Ganga and the Yamuna. This synthesis is also reflected in its crafts. Take silk, which is woven and designed by Muslims and sold by Hindus.

Traditionally, silk was considered the purest cloth for rituals and was used only to clothe temple deities. In fact, in ancient times, silk weavers used to live within the precincts of temples and perhaps that is how the silk trade came to the temple town of Varanasi.

Silk is woven into the very myth and history of Kashi. It is also said that after he attained Parinirvana, the Buddha's body was wrapped in silk from Kashi, woven so fine it did not even absorb oil. A variety of silk called *gaiser* was specially woven for the monks of the Tibetan monasteries.

In India, the silk sari from Varanasi is a legend of beauty. It was called *Kassiya* or *Kashivastra* and, even today, every Indian bride craves for at least one Benarasi sari in her trousseau.

The silk saris woven here use yarn that comes from Karnataka. It is the processing of the silk that give silk from every region its unique texture.

An artisan punches jacquard patterns before weaving

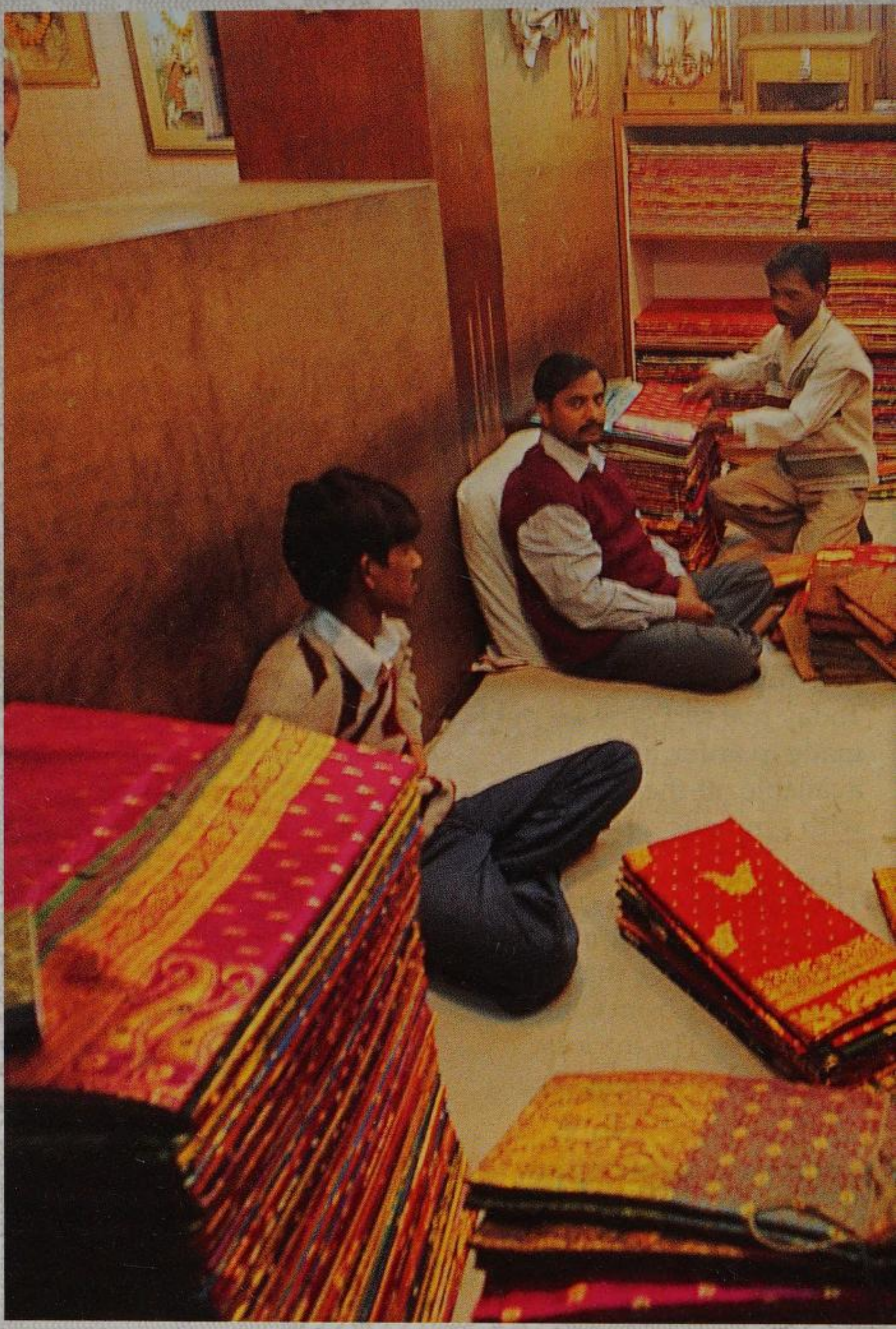
Silk yardage from the South is stiff as it is polished with wax. In Varanasi, the unprocessed or *kora* silk yarn is boiled and twisted, and then processed using arrowroot, *reetha* and flour. This soft skein is then woven into yardage called *katan*.

The most famous weaves are the heavy *jamdani* brocades woven with gold and silver thread called *zari*. Even fifty years ago, the *zari* was made of pure gold and silver, and these saris, when no longer worn, were sold for the precious metal they contained. Today real *zari* saris are only made to order, and what is available off-the-rack are saris with synthetic *zari*.

The other weave special to Varanasi is the *tanchoi*, an embossed weave that is said to have come from China with the traders. The intricate *baluchar* pattern is originally from Bengal, and the Varanasi weaver added *zari* to it. The *valkalam* on the other hand uses only satin thread and many of its designs are taken from motifs seen in miniature paintings.

The motifs used on the Banarasi sari have beautiful names like *guldasta* (bouquet), *ambi* (mango or paisley), *latifa* (flowers), *bel-buta* (creeper and buds) and *badal me phul* (blossoms in clouds).

To see the weavers at work you have to travel to the localities of Alaipura, Madanpura and Lallapura. Most weavers work from home and they can sometimes be a bit wary of visitors. So it is a good idea to get a guide to take you there and enter only if invited to do so. To watch wholesale trading in saris, go to the *sattees*, the dealer markets in Golghar and Kunj Gali.



The *sattees* are a shimmering wonderland of silk. The dealers called *gaddidars* sit in tiny cubicles called *gaddis* on white floor mattresses, leaning on bolsters. The weavers or *karigars* arrive carrying their cardboard boxes of saris and as they spread out the rainbow-hued silks, the transaction is done in a rapid-fire code of numbers.

Retail traders come from all corners of the country to buy saris from these *gaddidars*. Way back in the 2nd century BC, the grammarian Patanjali tells of how the *vaishyas* or traders referred to Varanasi as *Jaishila* for commerce always triumphed here.

From thence wee went to Benaras which is a great towne, and great store of cloth is made there of cotton and sashes of silke for the Moores.

– Ralph Fitch, 1583

Food

Pleasures of the Palate

Every morning, after a dip in the Ganga and *darshan* at Vishwanath Temple, the hungry pilgrim heads for the nearby Kachauri Gali. As you stroll down this lane, a whiff of the tempting bouquet of spices and the hiss of frying *puris* are sure to make you feel terribly hungry.

The food shops line the narrow lane, and the cooks sit beside huge pans of smoking oil, balanced on earthen ovens. The *puris, kachauris* and *pakoras* are fried and served hot with spicy vegetables and pickles. Dessert could be *jalebis* or a glass of cool *lassi* made of fresh curd.

When a city names its lanes after food, you know that it treats eating as a serious business. However, Varanasi cannot really claim to have a cuisine of its own. What it has done is blend the cuisine of the region and that of the communities settled in the city to create a superlative menu of vegetarian fare.

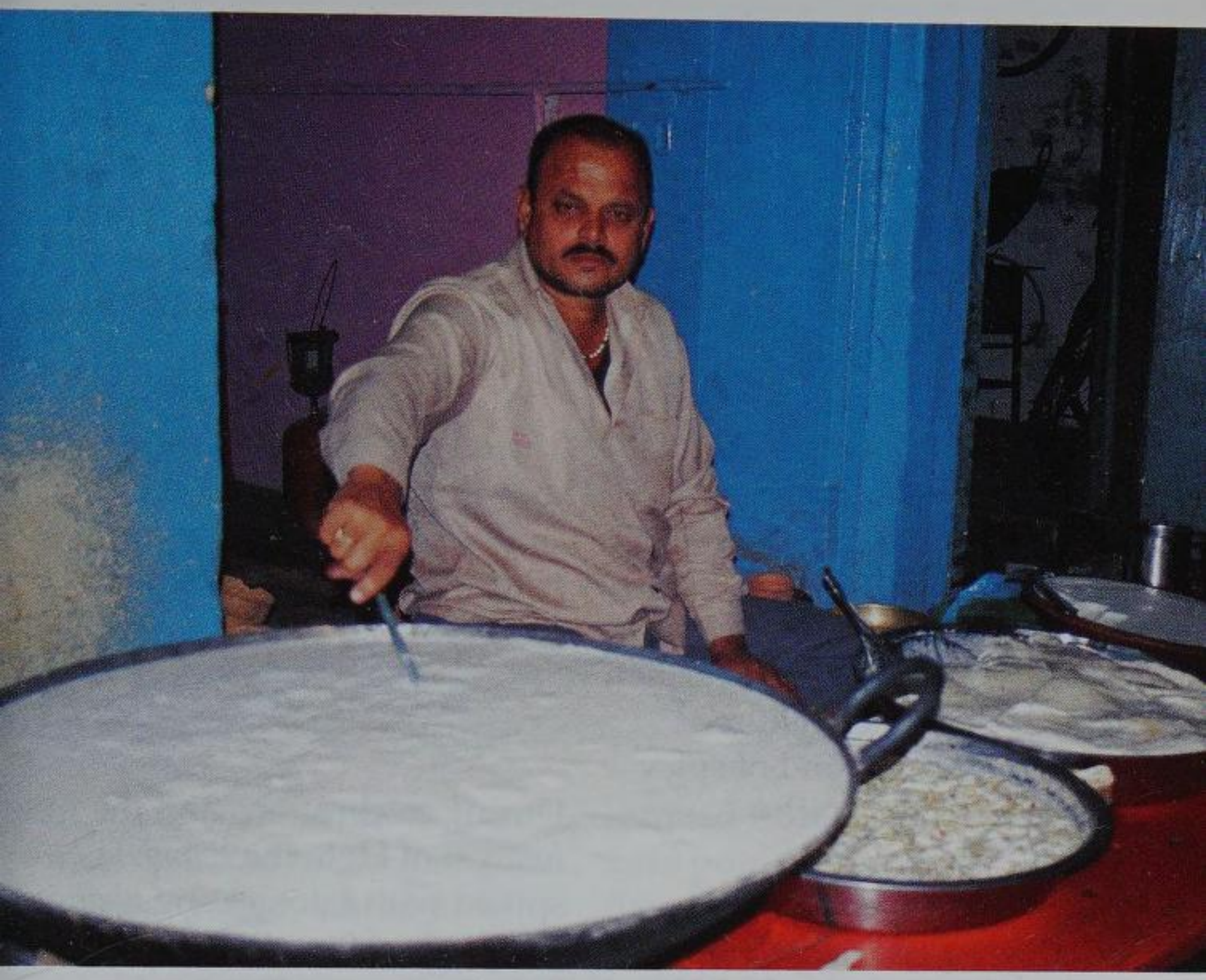
What Varanasi can truly call its own are the milk and curd-based drinks, the famous *lassi* and *thandai*, and, of course, the *banarasi paan*.

Varanasi has a string of special dishes connected to various rituals and festivals. The ritual offerings to the gods, the *naivedyam*, include milk-based sweets, *ghee*, honey, grain, fruit and vegetables. You can see them being carried into the temples on huge trays. The most elaborate meal to be offered to the gods is the legendary *chhappan bhog*, with fifty-six sweet and savoury dishes offered to Lord Krishna on Janamashtami.

On Makara Sankranti, women add sesame seeds to sweets. On Deepavali, the sweet shops sell candy animals, and a variety of *laddus* are ubiquitous on Ganesh Chaturthi. The biggest pile of sweets can be seen during the Annakut festival at the Annapurna Temple.

Every *gali* in the city has its own *halwai* or food shop that prepares a tempting spread of snacks, sweets and non-alcoholic drinks. The most popular snack is *kachauri* – fried pastry puffs stuffed with spicy lentils served with *aloo bhaji*, a spicy potato curry or *ghughni*, chick peas in a tangy gravy. Then there are *puris*, fried and puffed wheat bread and crunchy *pakoras*, chunks of seasonal vegetables dipped in gram-flour batter and deep fried. And, of course, there are the *samosas*, flour triangles stuffed with cooked potatoes and peas.

Besan or gram flour is used to create an inspired selection of crunchies like *papad*, *chura*, *bhujia* and *dalmoth*. And then there is the supreme snack of north India – *chaat*, a variety of



flour and lentil puffs and fruits with a topping of very hot spices, and a sweet-and-sour chutney.

In traditional homes, during meals, people sit on the floor or on low wooden stools and the food is served on a shiny brass plate, the *thali,* surrounded by small bowls, *katoris*. A variety of lentils, fries, vegetables and curd dishes are eaten with wheat *rotis, paranthas* and *puris*. The whole accompanied by a range of vegetable and fruit preserves – the tangy *achar* and the syrupy *morabbas*.

Well-off homes often have a Brahmin cook called the *maharaj,* who is the real monarch of the kitchen. In strict vegetarian homes, the food is *satvik*, that is, it is cooked without onions or garlic and, traditionally, the cooking medium is *ghee* – golden spoonfuls of clarified butter.

The gods and goddesses of Varanasi obviously adore sweets because kilos of *barfi, peda* and *laddu* are offered to them every day. One look at the shelves of sweet shops shows the inspired range of the cooks of the city.

The Bengalis have given some of the best cottage cheese sweets like the creamy round *rosogollas, chamcham* and *sandesh.* Thick, sweetened milk called *rabri* is served in earthen bowls and is the favoured dessert after a round of spicy hot, street-side snacks.

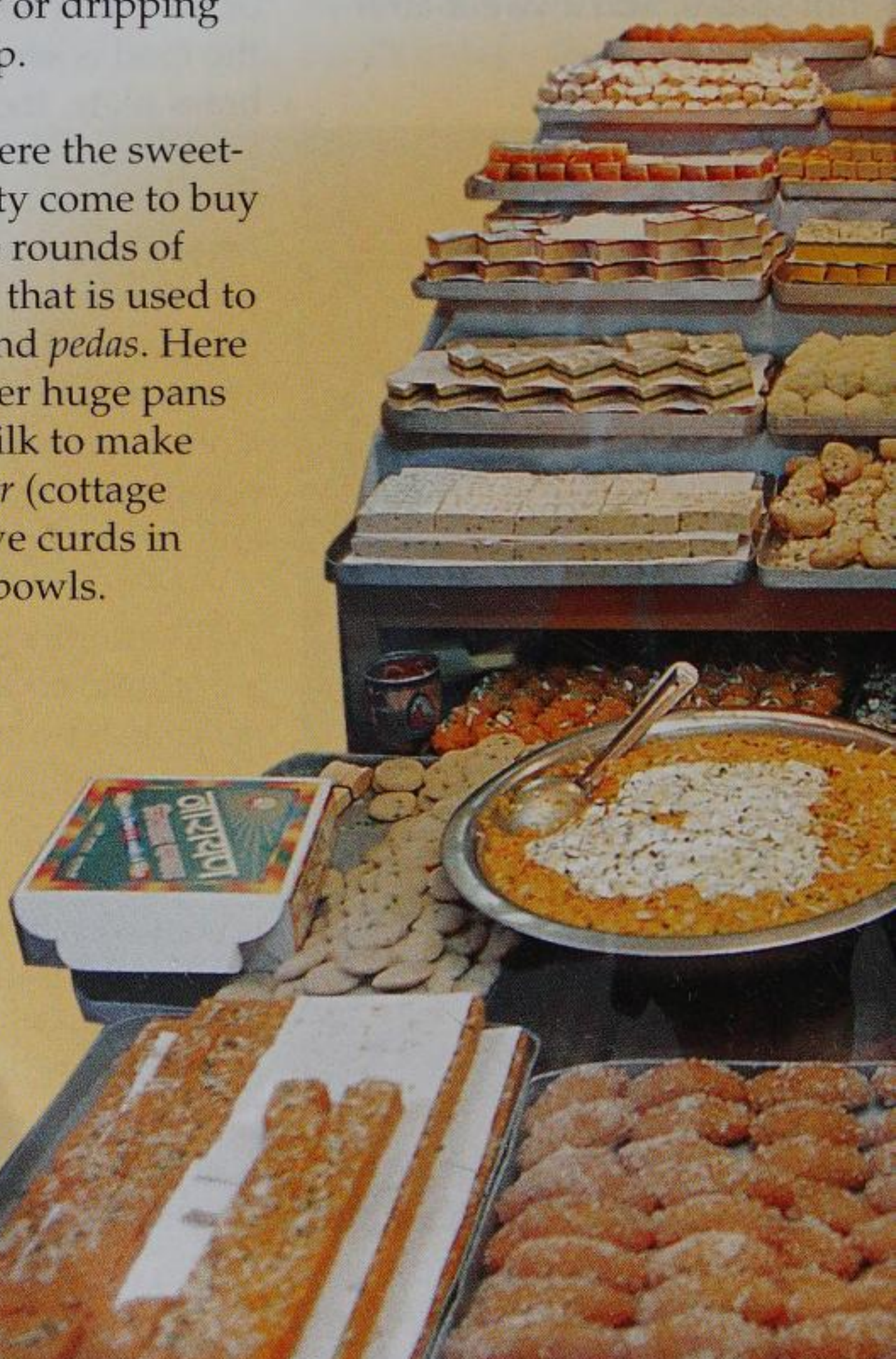
Also worth a taste are the *peda, malpua, khaja, balushahi, mohan bhog,* spirals of *jalebi* and creamy *malai gujiya*. Sweets in a melange of tastes – crunchy, creamy or dripping with sugar syrup.

Khoa Gali is where the sweet-makers of the city come to buy *khoa,* cheese-like rounds of condensed milk that is used to make the *barfi* and *pedas*. Here cooks labour over huge pans of thickening milk to make *khoa, rabri, paneer* (cottage cheese) and serve curds in chilled earthen bowls.

Varanasi also offers a delectable choice of non-alcoholic drinks. The colourful *sherbets* are made with fruits and aromatics like rose petals and *khus. Panna* is a delicious seasonal drink made with raw mangoes.

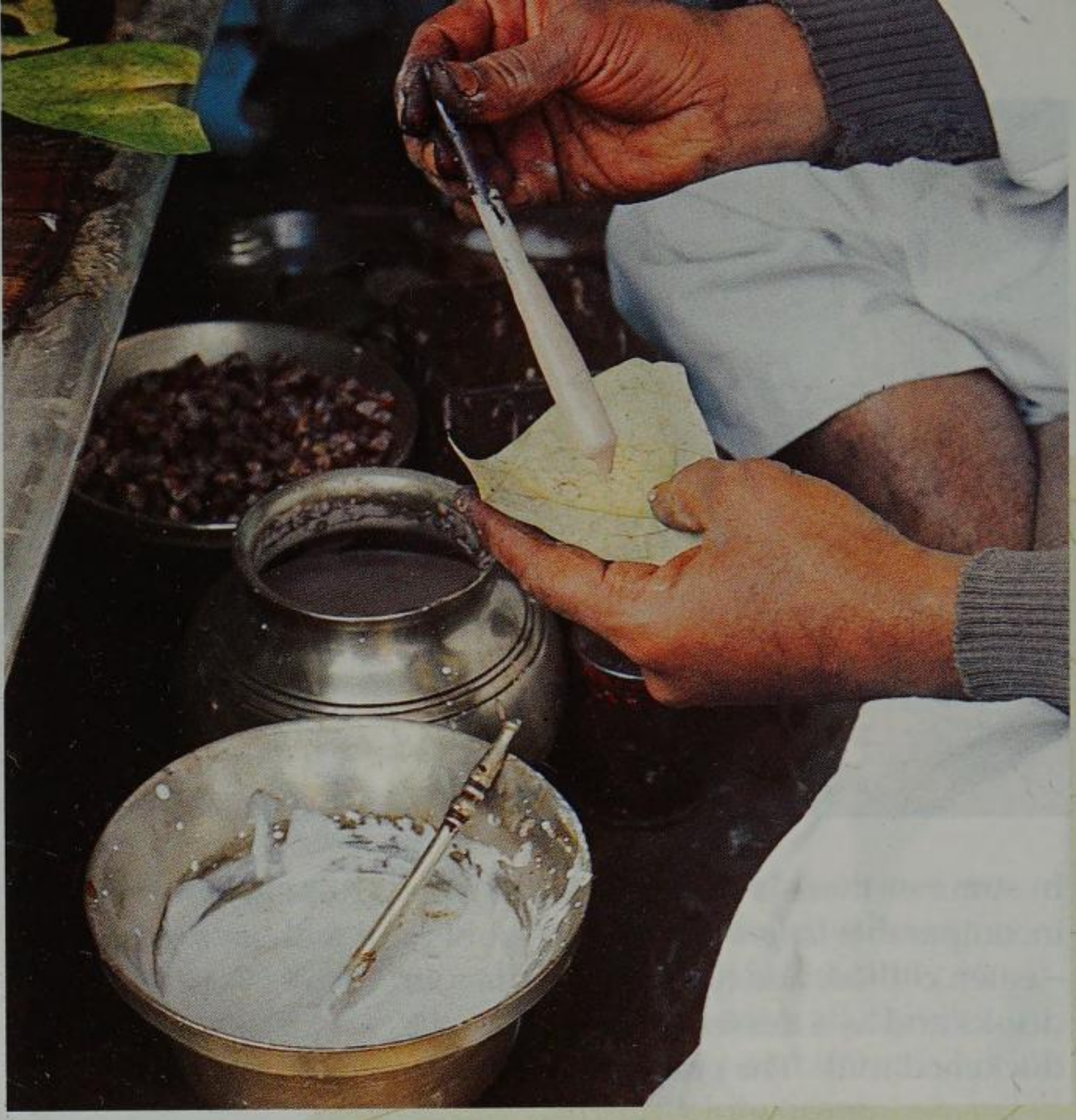
The *lassi* is a fragrant mix of milk and curd, churned smooth and frothy, topped with spices, dry fruits and served in clay cups. The *thandai* is rich with saffron and dry fruits.

During celebrations and the festival of Holi, the *thandai* is spiked with intoxicating *bhang* or opium. After all, this is Shiva's city and *bhang* is his favourite intoxicant.



In summer there is also the incomparable *langra* mangoes – eaten chilled, added to drinks and as a dessert in thickened milk. The green-skinned fruit has an orange-gold pulp with an irresistible flavour. Connoisseurs rate the *Banarasi langra* as among the best mangoes in India.

Tray upon tray of milk-based sweets in a *mithai* shop



Paan

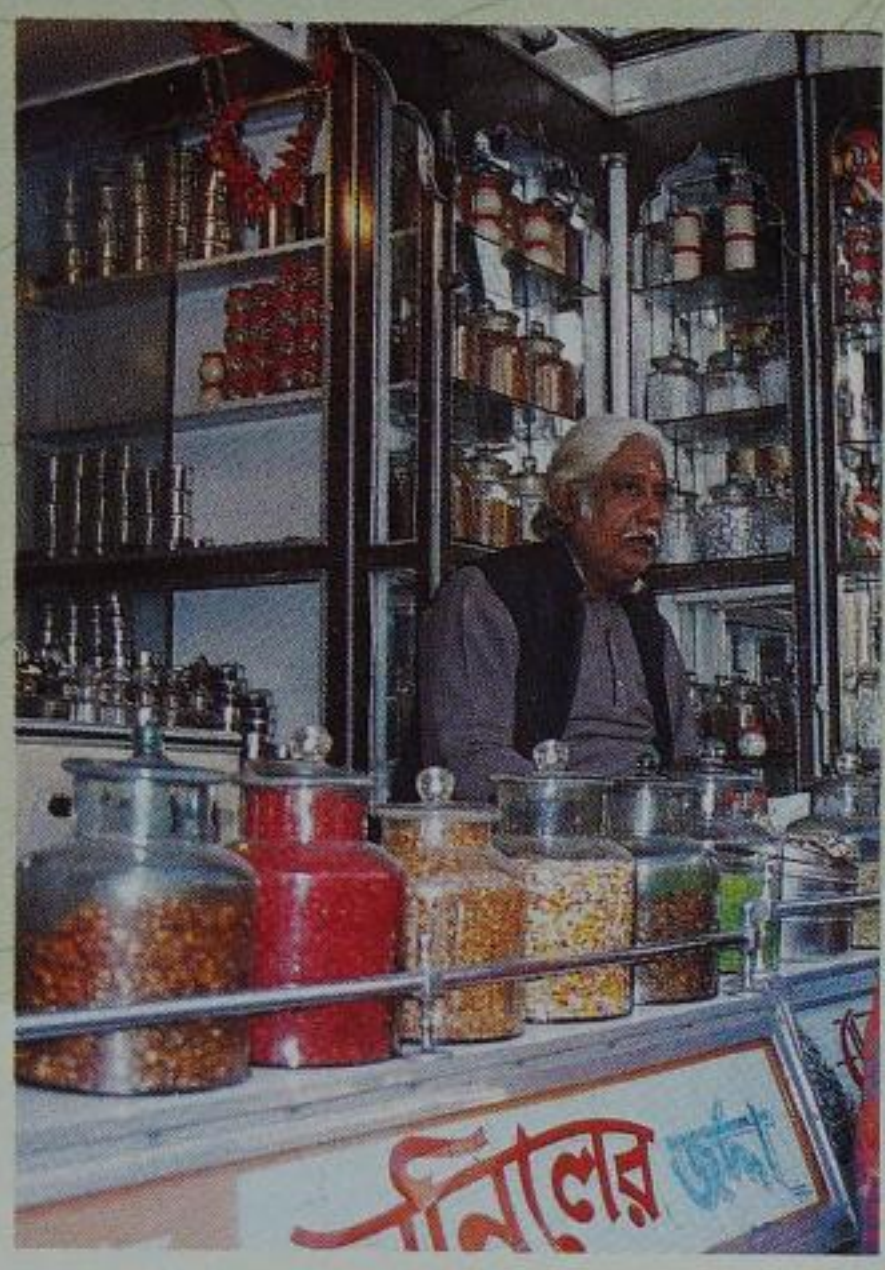
They write poems and ribald songs about this heart-shaped leaf. It is even mentioned in the Buddhist *Jataka* tales and, over the centuries, it has gathered its own legends as a symbol of celebration, friendship and romance. The *Kamasutra* mentions it as necessary to the rituals of courtship and courtesans reddened their lips by chewing a *paan*, a rolled betel leaf.

You welcomed guests with a tray of *paan*, it was shared to seal alliances or business deals, and at times even used to slip poison to an enemy. It is said that only courtesans and wrestlers were allowed to chew *paan* in the presence of the king.

The *banarasi paan* is an important part of the city's culture of *masti*. The leaves that range from pale to dark green in colour, are halved and a lime-and-catechu paste smeared on them. Slivers of areca nuts, tobacco powder, camphor, cardamom, coconut, mint and sweeteners are added to taste. The leaf is folded and pierced with a clove. And if you are so inclined, your *paan* can be spiked with aphrodisiacs, intoxicants, even ground pearls and covered with gold leaf or silver foil.

No *gali* or *mohalla* is complete without its own *paan* shop

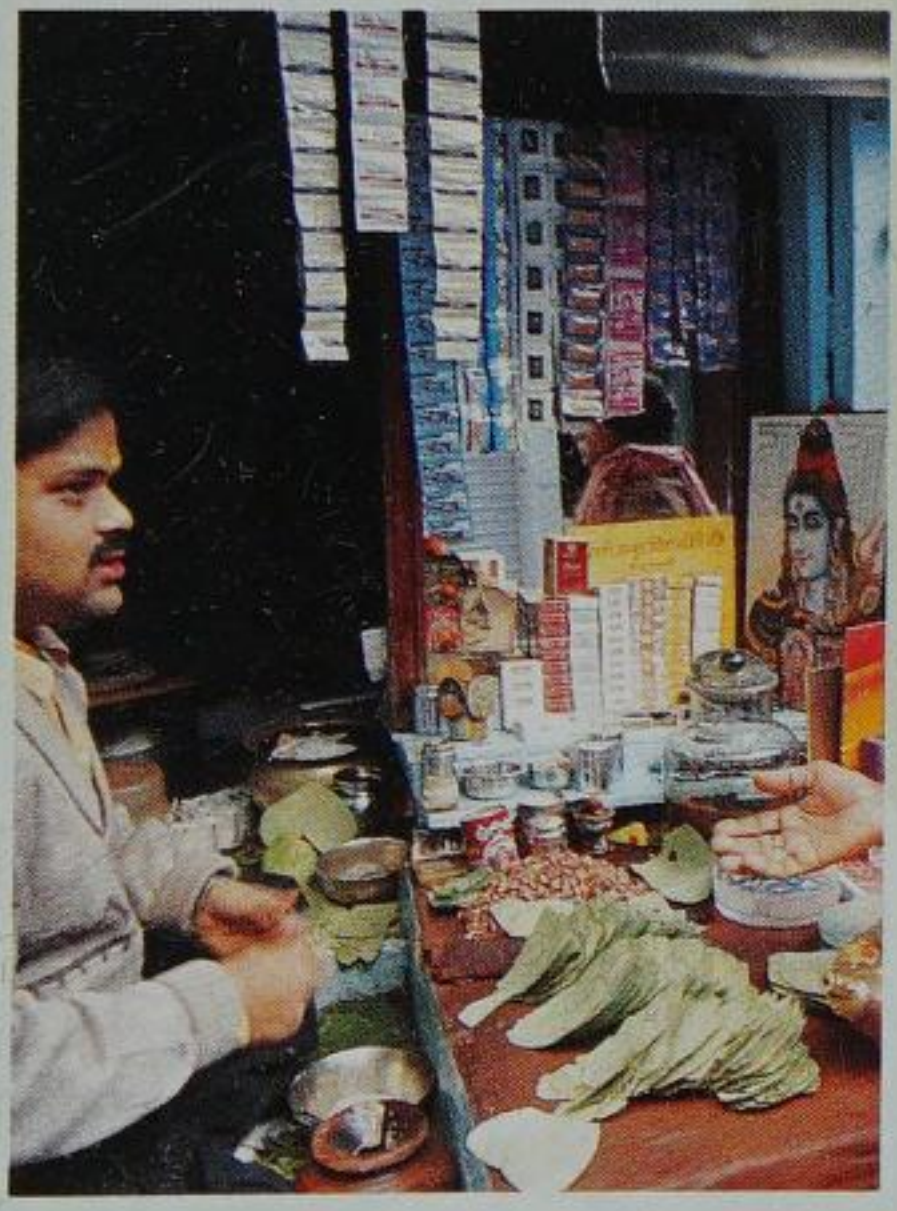
Varanasi's lanes are studded with *paan* shops, and connoisseurs claim they can tell the special blend of each *paanwala*. Most of the shops have a fly-spotted mirror, bright lights and shelves stacked with cigarette and *beedi* packets. The *paanwala* sits with a selection of betel leaves soaking in a brass pot and the ingredients in a row of shiny bowls before him. As he swiftly folds the leaves, a radio behind him will be blaring out the latest Hindi film songs.



The local *paan* shop is a place where people gather for a chat. Here you can get the hottest gossip and the latest cricket score with your favourite *beeda*.

In Sanskrit it is called *tambul* and chewing betel is an ancient habit. Old medicinal treatises like the *Charaka Samhita* list thirteen qualities of a good *paan*, including its look, taste and fragrance. Its medicinal properties include digestive or cough-repelling powers. Usually a *paan* is taken after a meal but addicts chew *paan* all day, often adding a few grains of aromatic tobacco called *zarda*.

At the *paan* wholesellers, baskets of freshly plucked leaves are auctioned early every morning. The most expensive variety is the soft Maghai, and the other valued ones are Bangla, Mitha, Kapoori, Banarasi and Mahoba.



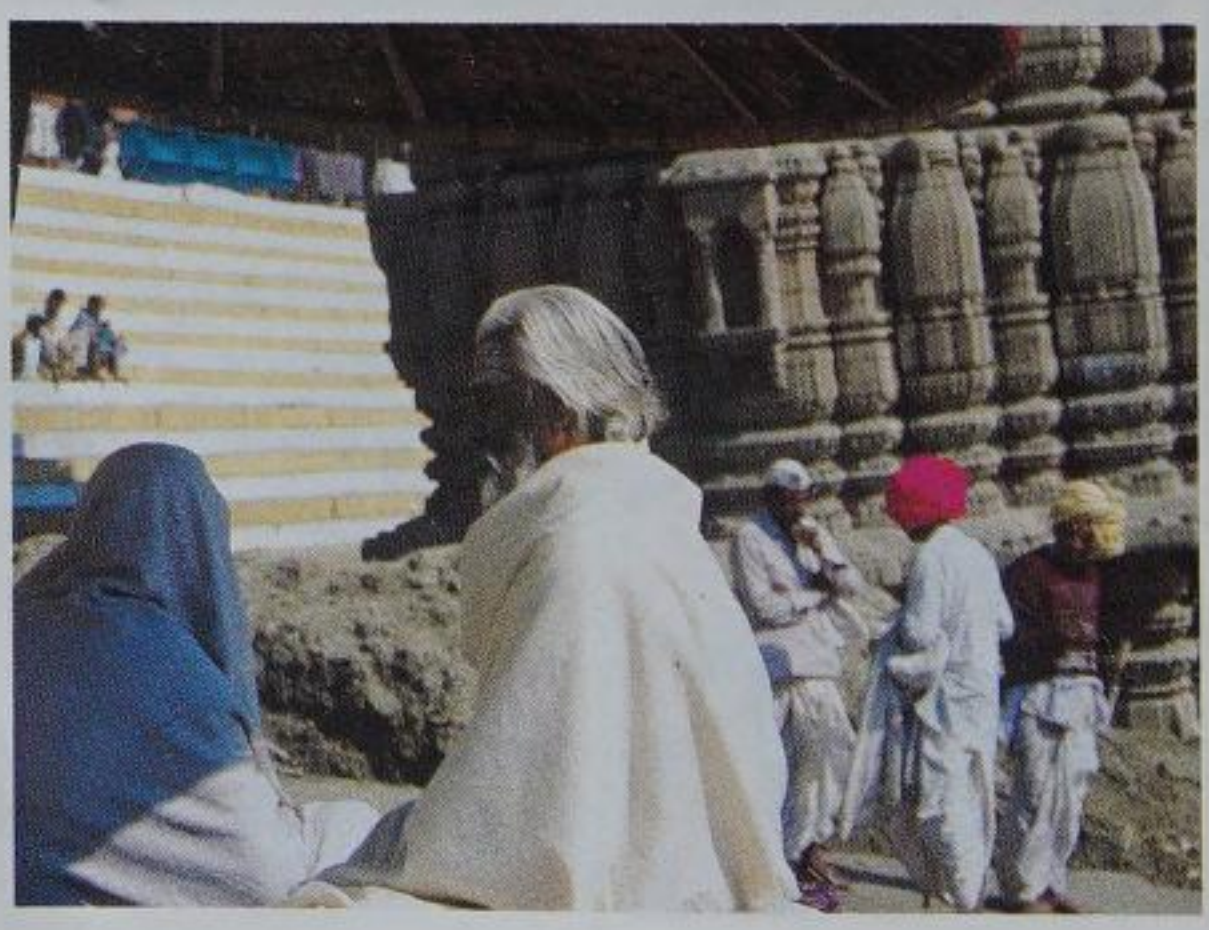
The rich have turned the making and serving of *paan* into an elaborate ritual. The ingredients are kept in *paandaans* of engraved silver, and the folded *paans* are offered on trays or impaled on silver chains. The areca nut is sliced fine with carved nutcrackers and silver spitoons are kept next to *divans* to receive the red *paan* juice. Style and panache seem to come naturally with the *banarasi paan*.

Indic Sciences

Ancient Scholarship

Ancient Kashi was a great centre of learning. In the numerous *ashrams* by the river, the *rishis* taught their students ancient Hindu texts. During medieval times, the city played a critical role in preserving Hindu scholarship. Even today, the Sanskrit language and its main texts, including the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, are taught in *ashrams* around Varanasi.

Among the best known centres of advanced learning in Varanasi are Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and Kashi Vidyapeeth College, the latter established in 1921 by Shiv Prasad Gupta. The nationalist leader, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya founded BHU in 1917, with the aim of combining the best of Indian and western scholarship. Inside BHU's sprawling campus lies the exquisite New Vishwanath Temple and the Kala Bhawan. The latter houses a magnificent collection of Indian sculpture and painting.



Varanasi is traditionally associated with *yoga*, *ayurveda*, and *jyotishshastra* or astrology. For centuries it has preserved the traditional knowledge in health and healing, the esoteric science of prediction and the study of stars.

Yoga

The tradition of Yoga is founded in ancient Indian philosophy. Yoga, literally communion or union, is a system by which the living individual or *jeevatma* can merge with the Supreme Being or *parmatma*. The supplementary benefits of this spiritual serenity are a healthy body and mind.

The earliest archaeological evidence of the existence of yogic practices dates to around 3,000 BC and is provided by a number of stone seals found in Indus Valley sites that show figures in yogic postures. According to mythic tradition, Shiva is said to be the founder of Yoga and his consort, Parvati, his first disciple. Yoga is first mentioned in the *Vedas*, but it is in the later texts, the *Upanishads*, that we find the main foundations of Yoga teaching.

Varanasi, the city where yogis and rishis have come for millennia, is still caught up with the rhythms of the Yoga tradition. Uttar Pradesh Tourism organises an annual **International Yoga Festival** here, where learned yoga teachers or *yogacharyas* train enrolled groups in the intricacies of *asanas* or postures, *pranayama* or breathing control, and meditation or *dhyana*. Bookings can be made at the UP Tourism Development Corporation offices or with travel agents accredited to the UPTDC.

Ayurveda

Ayurveda is an ancient Indian system of healing. Ayurveda, literally 'knowledge of life', draws on the premise that physical health is integral to spiritual well-being. This system of healthcare originated some 5,000 years ago in the oral teachings of the ancient *rishis* or spiritual masters.

Ayurveda is respected and widely used in India and the *galis* of Varanasi are filled with little shops selling vials and powders of roots and herbs to cure you of all manners of maladies, and guarantee you a long *ayu* or life.

In fact, the practice of Ayurveda has spread much beyond the confines of India and across the world people are turning to this nature-based system to cure themselves of their ills. Herbs and poultices, dietary habits, massage and meditation are all devices of Ayurveda.

The burgeoning beauty and herbal industry in India as well as other countries, have adopted the principles of Ayurveda and its natural processes.

Roots and seeds used
in the practice of Ayurveda

The ancient sages followed the philosophy spelled out in the *Vedas*, the hymnal books of knowledge, and developed Ayurveda as a method for balancing the diverse energies within the human body and thus promoting optimal health and longevity. Ayurvedic theory influenced Greek and Chinese medicine and evolved into a sophisticated system for preventing and treating disease.

The cornerstone of Ayurveda's medical philosophy is the identification of *doshas* or humours. These *doshas* – *vayu*, *pitta* and *kapha* – govern your physical, mental and spiritual health and can be regulated and balanced to ensure health and longevity. The use of herbs, foods, aromas, gems, colours, Yoga, *mantras*, lifestyle changes and surgery are all used to modify your *dosha*.

Treatises on the subject can be found in the three ancient books that sought to transcribe the oral tradition of Ayurveda – the *Atreya Samhita*, the *Charaka Samhita* and the *Susruta Samhita*. These works reveal a remarkable knowledge of human anatomy and disease.

The *Susruta Samhita*, for instance, graphically described blood circulation centuries before William Harvey discovered it and the *Charaka Samhita* described the importance of gastric juices in digestion long before Pavlov did.

Jyotishshastra

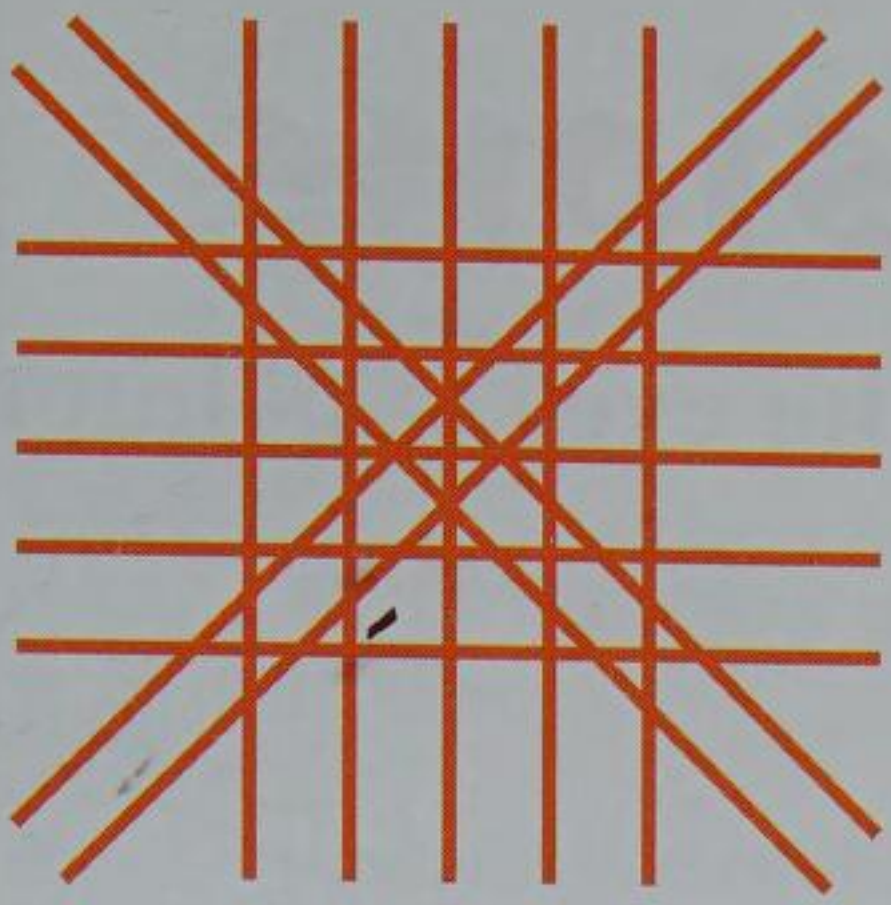
Jyotishshastra or astrology has been practised in India for centuries. The Indian system uses the precise position of stars and it is based on both the lunar and solar calendar. Palmistry and numerology are also used. *Muhurta*, the moment, is very important as it can be both auspicious and unlucky.

The *jyotishis* of Kashi are considered extremely authoritative, and politicians and businessmen are known to consult them before making any critical decisions.

Ayurveda in Varanasi

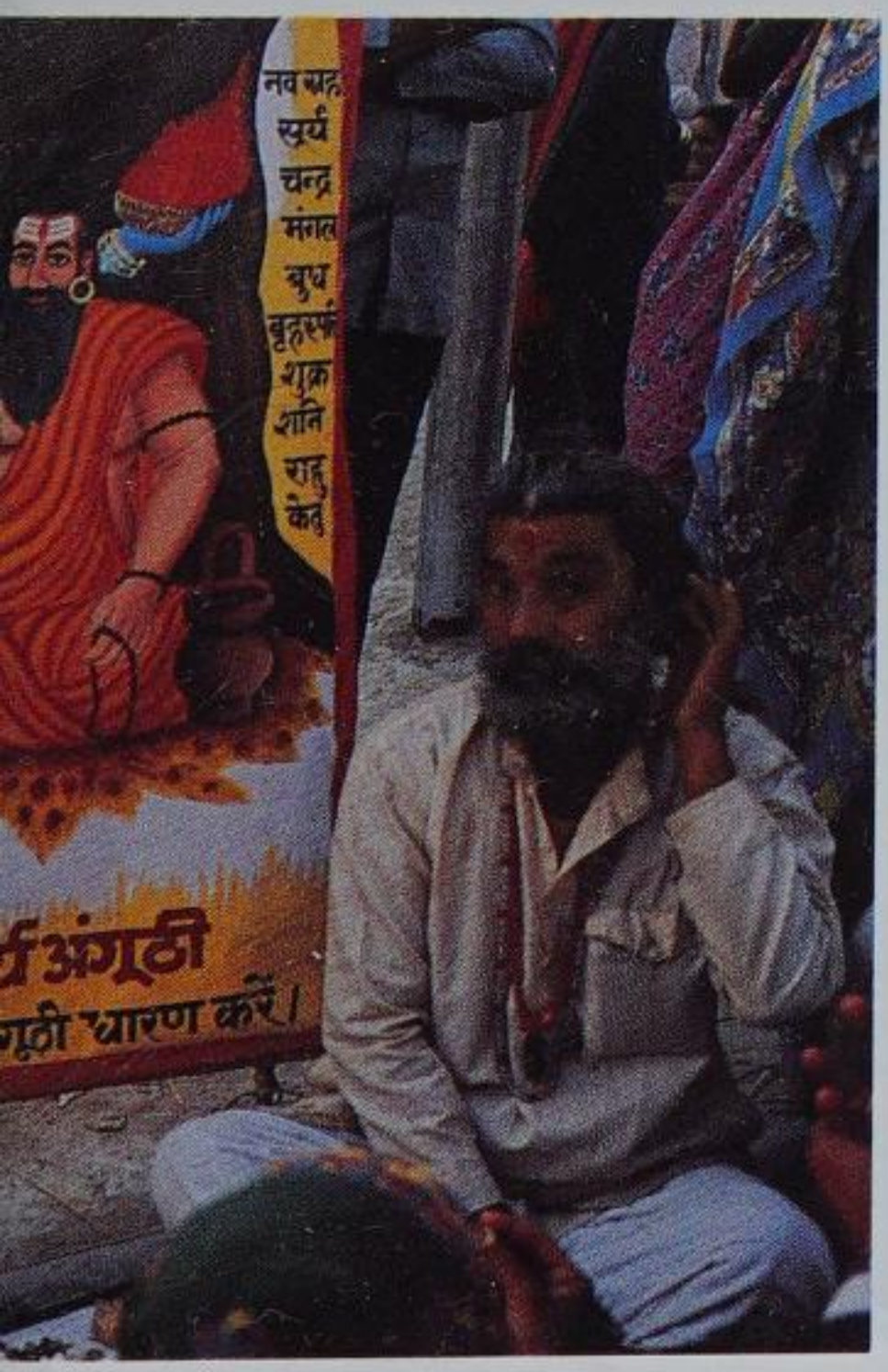
Ayurveda has strong roots in Varanasi. According to a popular myth, Indra, the king of the gods, handed down ayurvedic knowledge to a prince of Kashi called Dhanvantari. This divine revelation was then passed down from *rishi* to *rishi*. Sage Bharadwaj, generally believed to be the founder of Indian medicine, passed on these skills to Atreya, who set up a school of Ayurveda at Takshila. One of Atreya's most brilliant students was Susruta, who went on to found the school of medicine at Kashi.

Susruta, the 6th century sage who is believed to be one of Ayurveda's earliest theorists and practitioners, was believed to be a skilful surgeon and even performed operations that closely approximate modern rhinoplasty.



And of course, a traditional Indian marriage cannot be arranged until the *jyotishi* matches the horoscopes of the bride and groom.

Jyotishshastra is based on the Hindu philosophy that one's actions and fortunes are determined by a predestined cosmic design. That design reflects the will of God for you. *Jyotishshastra*, literally the Science of Light, helps read the stars in order to understand God's will.



Panchang

Jyotishshastra uses as its basis the Hindus calendar or *Panchang* that is at once a spiritual and scientific almanac. It provides a listing of festivals, weather predictions, events, epidemics and personal fortune. *Panch* means five and *ang*, aspect. This takes into account five aspects namely:

- *Din* or the solar day
- *Tithi* or the lunar day
- *Nakshatra* or the constellation
- *Yoga*
- *Karan*

In the Hindu method of calculations, it is recognised that the earth takes 365.2563 days for a revolution around the sun. However, the astrological calculations are done according to the revolution of the moon around the earth, which falls short by approximately 7 days during one year, when compared to calculations done according to the solar calendar. The *panchang*, based on the 12 months of a lunar calendar, comes level with the *Ayanas* or solar calculation by adding a month (known as *Loonth* or *Purshottam Maas*) after every three years.

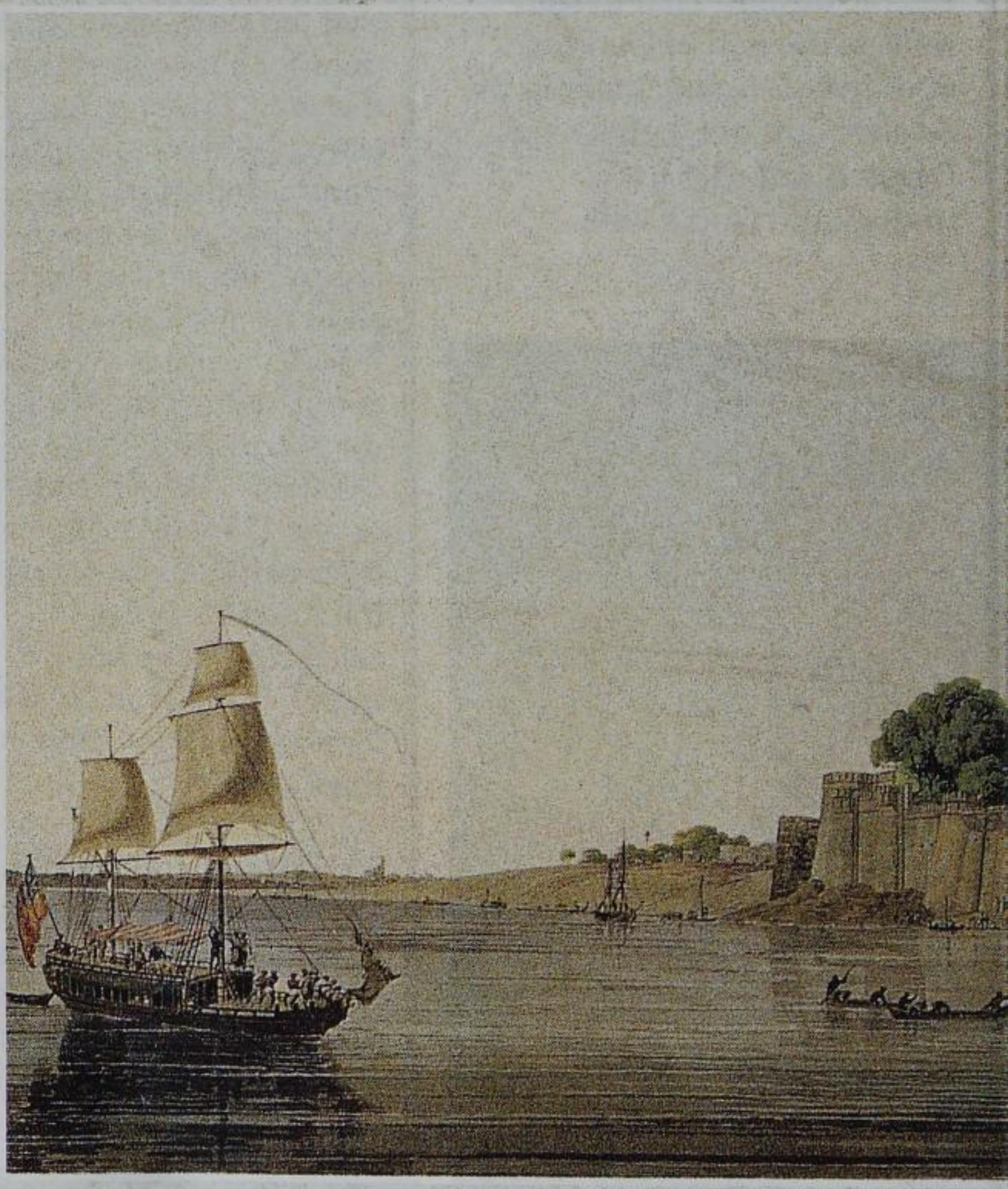
For Hindus, *Panchang* is much more than the meaning of time; it is the essence of religion and living, which predicts the spiritual path of people on a journey towards God.

Expressions

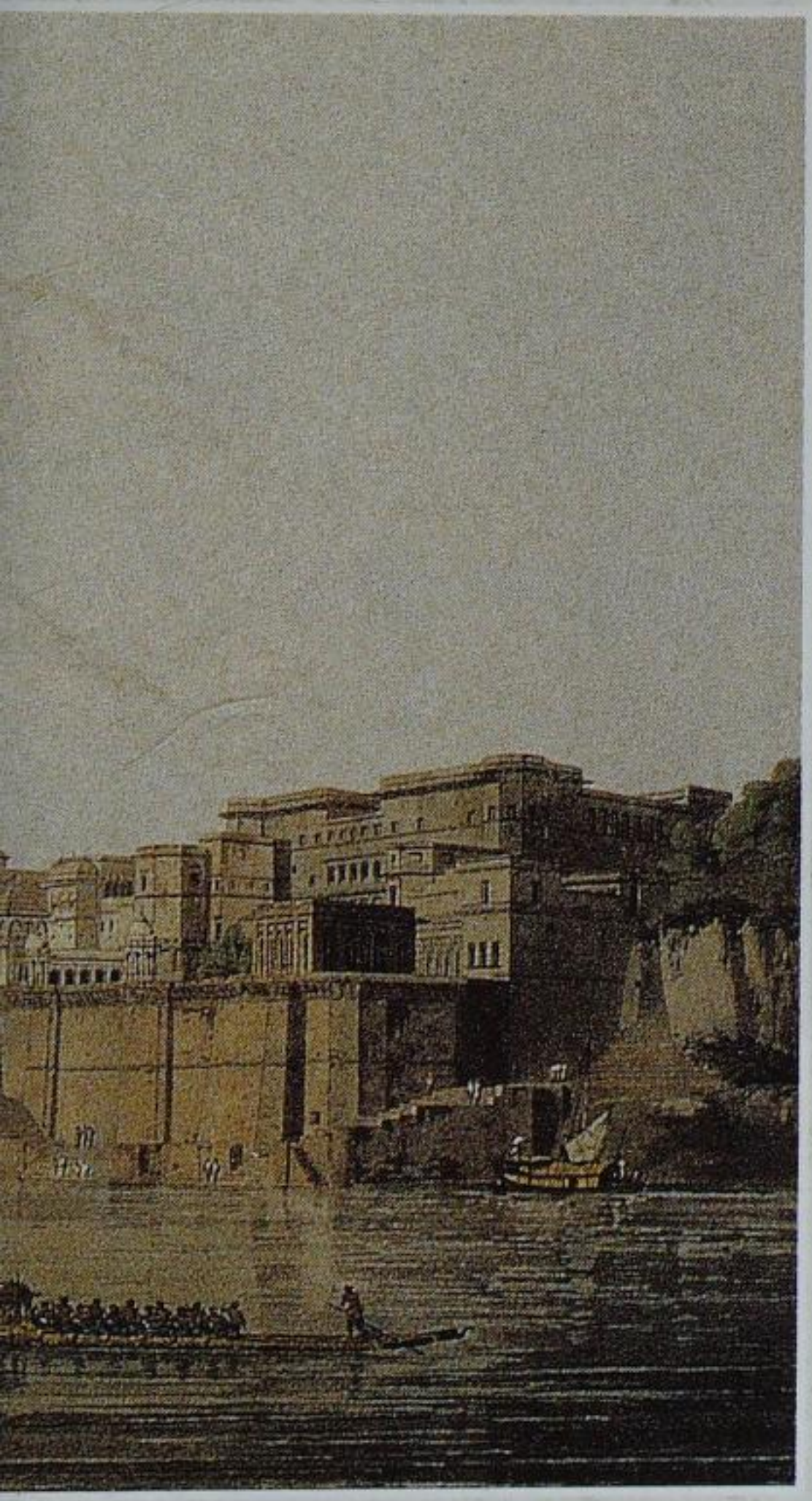
Varanasi through the eyes of painters

...where so many generations of men have looked for inspiration, at whose shrines they have quickened their faith, in whose stone-paved alleys the old and the new are forever playing hide and seek...such is Benaras, eternal and ageless, bright and beautiful and intensely vital.

– Sir Maurice Gwyer



Varanasi
Thomas Easley, Oil on Wood, 1994.
Times Group Collection



Ramnugur near Benares on the Ganges
Thomas Daniell,
Coloured aquaint, 1796.
Private Collection.

Benaras Landscape
Manu Parikh,
Oil on Canvas, 1988.
Private Collection.

Varanasi: A Vision
Ram Kumar,
Oil on Canvas, 2000.
Vadehra Art Gallery

It is not enough to say that the ghats of Benaras are wonderful or exciting or unique...the more you probe, the more is revealed.

– Satyajit Ray, 1921-92

Benaras Ghat
Benodebehari Mukherjee,
Chinese ink on paper, 1943.
Vishwa Bharati University.

Excursions

There are a number of places worth visiting within easy driving distance of Varanasi. These excursions are an enjoyable break from the noise and crowds of the city. The Chunar Fort and the Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary are an excellent day's outing. Jaunpur offers a very different medieval Islamic ambience and Kaushambi still reverberates to the chants of Buddhist monks.

Chunar (40 kms)

Chunar Fort is said to be built by the legendary king, Raja Vikramaditya.

Chunar is famous for its sandstone that was first used by the Mauryan emperor, Ashoka for pillars on which he carved his royal edicts. Many of the palaces and pavilions lining the *ghats* of Varanasi are made of Chunar sandstone. The picturesque fort stands on the Kaimur hills on the banks of the Ganga. This ancient fortress was conquered by Akbar; later it was stormed by the Nawab of Awadh and the British. Inside there is an interesting sundial, a deep well and an open pavilion called the Sonwa Mandap.

Chunar is accessible by road from Varanasi and an overnight stay is possible at the PWD Guest House.

Jaunpur (58 kms)

Once the capital of the sultans of the Sharqi dynasty, the city stands by the Gomti river. Jaunpur was once a centre of trade, education and culture. Rarely visited today, it has fine examples of 14th and 15th century Islamic architecture. Ferozshah Tughlaq founded the city in 1360 in memory of his cousin Muhammad bin Tughlaq, who was also called Jauna.

The architecture is in a distinctive blend of Hindu and Islamic styles. Worth visiting is the 200-metre long 16th century Akbari Bridge. Jaunpur Fort (1360) stands by the river and within its collapsing stone walls stands the oldest mosque in the city.

The finest example of Jaunpuri architecture is the Atala Mosque (1408). It has beautiful arches, cloisters and turrets. Its central arch, soaring to 22 metres, is the highest in India. The Jami Masjid (1478) is the biggest mosque in Jaunpur. It stands on a high plinth, enclosing an immense courtyard and the prayer hall is topped by a lofty dome. Other mosques are the Lal Darwaza Masjid and Khalis Mukhlis Masjid.

Among the Hindu pilgrimages in the city are the Shitala Choukiya Dham, an ancient temple dedicated to the goddess Shitala and the Yamdagni Ashram, associated with the Vedic sage Parashuram. The popular Trilochan Mahadev Temple is dedicated to Shiva.

Jaunpur is famous for its jasmine oil and a variety of natural flower perfumes, *attar*. The city is accessible by road and rail from Varanasi and has many reasonably priced hotels.

Vindhyachal (80 kms)

Vindhyachal is a *Shaktipeeth*, an ancient pilgrimage dedicated to the Mother Goddess. Mentioned in the *Puranas*, it is situated 8 kms from Mirzapur, a major carpet weaving centre. It is dotted with temples, the most famous being the one dedicated to Vindhyavasini Devi. Pilgrims crowd the temple during the Navaratras in the months of Chaitra (spring) and Ashwin (autumn). Among the other important shrines dedicated to the Mother Goddess are the Ashtabhuja Temple, Sita Kund and Kali Khoh.

Vindhyachal is accessible by road and rail from Varanasi. As the nearest town, Mirzapur has many hotels and as Vindhyachal is a pilgrimage there are many *dharmashalas* here. Shop at Mirzapur for hand-knotted carpets, terracotta and metalware.

Kaushambi (185 kms)

Legends say Kaushambi was associated with the Pandava brothers, heroes of the epic *Mahabharata*. Situated by the banks of the Yamuna river, it was the capital of King Udaya who was a contemporary of Gautama Buddha. Now it is a part of the Buddhist circuit as Lord Buddha visited it in the sixth and ninth year after his Enlightenment. Here he delivered several sermons and important discourses to his followers and Kaushambi became a centre of Buddhist learning. It has the ruins of an ancient fortress, the remains of an Ashokan pillar and the Ghositaram Monastery. Archaeological excavations here have yielded many Mauryan period coins, stone and terracotta sculptures that are now housed at the Archaeological Museum in Allahabad, 58 kms away.

Wildlife Sanctuaries

The two sanctuaries closest to Varanasi are the Chandraprabha Wildlife Sanctuary (70 kms) and the Kaimur Wildlife Sanctuary (130 kms).

The picturesque forests of Chandraprabha are ideal for outings. Within the forest are the delightful Rajdari and Devdari waterfalls. Kaimur is a 500 sq km spread of forests with a variety of wildlife.

Arriving in India

When to come to India

The best time to come to India is between October and March. During the winter months of December and January, the day temperature in the plains of north India is around 18°C (64°F) and could go down to 4°C (39°F) at night.

The summer months of May and June are hot, and the temperature can rise as high as 46°C (115°F). After the scorching heat, monsoons arrive towards the end of June and the rainy season stretches till September.

What to wear

India does not have a fixed dress code. Local dresses such as *salwar kameez* with *dupatta* is a wonderfully relaxed and easy-to-wear dress for women, as is the *kurta* and *pajama*, with sandals or leather *kolhapuri chappals,* for men. The sari is the most popular attire for women, while young women and girls are seen in western clothes.

It would be sensible to wear comfortable clothes which do not attract unnecessary attention. A windcheater or a light jacket over a cardigan or a sweater should suffice in winter. Loose cotton clothes that are cool and protect the hands and legs from the heat and the dust are the best summer wear. It is advisable to wear a scarf or a hat to protect one's head from the blazing heat of an Indian summer.

Before coming to India

There are a few things you need to take care of before travelling to India.

Visa

There are three kinds of visas for tourists.

1. The 15-day single / double-entry transit visa. This visa is valid for 30 days from the date of its issue.

2. The 3-month multiple-entry visa. This visa is valid for 90 days from the date of first entry into India, which must be within 30 days from the date of its issue.

3. The 6-month multiple-entry visa. This visa is valid for 180 days from the date of its issue, not from the date of entry into India.

Visa Extension

It is virtually impossible to get the 15-day or 3-month visa extended. Only the 6-month tourist visa can be extended. It can be quite a bother to extend it beyond a 15-day period. Avoid it unless there is an emergency.

A 15-day extension on the 6-month visa is issued by the **Foreigners' Regional Registration Office (FRRO)** at any of the four metros: **Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai**. The FRRO office is oper on weekdays, 9.30 am to 1.30 pm and 2 pm to 4 pm. A I5-day extension is given only if confirmed air tickets are not available. No fee is charged.

- **New Delhi:** FRRO, Hans Bhawan
  1st Floor, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg
  Ph 3378179
- **Kolkata:** FRRO
  237 AJC Bose Road
  Ph 2473300
- **Chennai:** FRRO, Shastri Bhawan
  Haddows Road, Nungambakkam
  Ph 3275424
- **Mumbai:** FRRO, Dr DN Road
  (near Police Commissioner's Office)
  Ph 2620446

Travel Insurance

Take a travel insurance policy, covering theft and loss, before coming to India. Also buy a medical insurance.

There are several kinds of insurance policies. Make the right choice after consulting a reliable travel agent in your country.

Driving Licence

A valid International Driving Licence is necessary if you wish to drive a car or a motorcycle in India and it is advisable to get one before coming. If you do not have an International Driving Licence and still wish to drive in India, you can get a Temporary Driving Licence, provided you are carrying a valid driving licence of your country. You may still be required to give a test to check your knowledge of road signs.

Health

Your health during your travel in India depends on three things: Precautions taken before arrival, day-to-day health care, and efficiency in tackling emergencies.

No particular vaccination is required for coming to India. However, visitors from designated countries in Africa, South America and Papua New Guinea, even if they are on transit, are required to bring valid Yellow Fever vaccination certificates. In the absence of this certificate they will be quarantined for six days.

Precautionary medication is the best bet against common ailments like diarrhoea, dysentry and malaria. Malaria is a problem in India during the rainy season. So, if you are coming at that time of the year, do consult your doctor for precautionary anti-malarial medication. While in India, use mosquito repellent ointment.

If you are not already vaccinated against Hepatitis B, get it done before travelling.

Those not accustomed to Indian conditions are usually vulnerable to stomach problems. It is advisable to seek qualified medical advice before travelling and carry your own first-aid kit.

For travel health, use your common sense. Take care of what you eat or drink. This is the most important health rule. Water is suspect, therefore, it is best to carry your own mineral water. Bottled mineral water and aerated drinks are easily avaliable and are a good substitute for water. Hot tea and coffee are also good alternatives.

Diarrhoea (the English call it 'delhi-belly') is the most common stomach ailment. Take a three or five-day course of anti-diarrhoea tablets duly prescribed by a doctor.

Diarrhoea leads to dehydration. So, along with medication, drink a lot of water with salt and sugar. There are some restrictions on your diet, too. Alcohol, milk, meat, fried and spicy foods should be avoided. If the upset stomach persists, get a stool test done as it might be amoebic dysentery.

The tropical sun is extremely strong during the summer months, so guard against sun stroke and dehydration. Wear a hat and dark glasses when you go out. Drink lots of non-alcoholic liquids, water and fruit juice. Allow sweat to evaporate, wear loose cotton clothes. Use sun screen lotions and talcum powder as a precaution against prickly heat rash.

Things you can bring into India

Visitors can bring in articles for personal use, including cameras with five rolls of film, a reasonable quantity of jewellery, a pair of binoculars, a portable musical instrument, a portable radio, a tape recorder, a portable typewriter, a laptop computer and professional equipment. On arrival, you will have to give an undertaking on a Tourist Baggage Re-Export (TBRE) form, available with Customs officials at the airport, that you will take these items back when you leave. This form, along with the articles that are entered in it, have to be shown to the Customs officials at the time of departure.

Designated 'high-value articles' are also allowed in, but on a written undertaking that they will be taken back at the time of departure. Please obtain a Landing Certificate if you are expecting unaccompanied baggage and for mishandled baggage.

You can bring in 200 cigarettes (or 50 cigars or 250 gms of tobacco) and liquor and wine up to 32 oz (1 litre).

You are allowed to bring in any amount of foreign currency in cash or travellers' cheques. However, if you are carrying more than US $ 2500 (or equivalent), you have to declare it on arrival. Fill up the Currency Declaration Form (CDF) which is to be attested by the Customs Officer. Indian currency cannot be brought in or taken out of the country.

Things you can take back

Export Regulations:

A visitor can take back the following goods:

a. Souvenirs (including Indian silk, wool, handicrafts, etc) without any limit.

b. Gold jewellery and silverware up to a value of Rs100,000 (and in excess of that only after obtaining a permit from the RBI, the Indian central bank).

c. Other jewellery and precious stones, but if of high value, these should be appraised by the Customs Appraiser at the airport before departure.
As a general rule, get an RBI permit for goods of high value. There are restrictions on the export of antiques and art objects which are more than 100 years old. In case of doubt, consult the Director, Antiquities,
Archaeological Survey of India
Janpath, New Delhi (Ph 3017443).
It is advisable to get a certificate of proof.

Export of most wildlife products is either prohibited or strictly regulated. Do not buy articles made of ivory, reptile, tiger or deer skin, tortoise shell, *shahtoosh* shawls made by killing the Tibetan antelope.

Tax Clearance Certificate

If you stay in India for more than 120 days (4 months), from the date of issue of the visa, regardless of your date of entry into India, you would be required to furnish a tax clearance certificate to leave the country. This is to prove that you did not earn money while in India and that your trip was financed with the money brought in. If you are planning to stay in India for more than four months, be careful with your documents relating to travel finance.

If you are not an Indian passport holder and you are planning to stay in India for more than four months, apply for the certificate at the **Income Tax Department, Central Revenue Building** (ITO),

Foreign Travel Tax

Rs 500 has to be paid at the airport as Foreign Travel Tax when leaving the country. For travel to Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Myanmar, the Maldives and Afghanistan, the tax is Rs 150.

Customs

There are two channels for customs clearance at International terminals in Indian airports: Green Channel and Red Channel.

Green Channel

This is for unhindered exit from the airport. You can walk through the Green Channel if you are not carrying goods which attract customs duty.

Red Channel

For those who have anything to declare, including money worth more than US $2500.

Arriving in India by Air

Delhi

Delhi airport is called the Indira Gandhi International Airport. It has two terminals: Terminal 1 (domestic) and Terminal 2 (international). The two terminals are 7 kms away from each other. Terminal 2 is 19 kms from the city centre at Connaught Place.

Airport Enquiry

Domestic Terminal
Ph 5675121/ 5675126

International Terminal
Ph 5652011/ 5652021

Airlines Offices

Indian Airlines
Malhotra Bldg, F Block, Connaught Place
Ph 3310517, Airport Ph 5675121

Jet Airways
N 40 Connaught Place
Ph 3321241, Airport Ph 5675404

Sahara India Airlines
Ambadeep Bldg, 14 K G Marg
Ph 3326851, Airport Ph 5675234

Air India
Jeevan Bharti Bldg, 124 Connaught Circus
Ph 3731225, Airport Ph 5696621

Tourist Information Offices

Tourist Office, Govt of India
88 Janpath Ph 3320008

Ashok Tours & Travels (ITDC)
Kanishka Shopping Plaza, Ashoka Road
Ph 3344422

Tourist Information Office, Govt of UP
Chanderlok Bldg, 36 Janpath
Ph 3322251

Kolkata

Kolkata airport is called Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Airport, and is 22 kms from the city centre at BBD Bagh. It has two terminals, international and domestic, located in the same building.

Airlines Offices

Indian Airlines
City Office Ph 2360730, Airport Ph 5119637

Jet Airways
City Office Ph 2292227, Airport Ph 5118836

Sahara India Airlines
City Office Ph 2827686, Airport Ph 5119545

Air India
City Office Ph 2822356, Airport Ph 5119864

Tourist Information Offices

Tourist Office, Govt of India
Embassy, 4 Shakespeare Sarani
Ph 2421402 / 2421475

Tourism Centre, Govt of West Bengal
3/2, BBD Bagh East Ph 2488271

Tourist Office, Govt of UP
12-A, Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Road
Ph 2207855.

Mumbai

Mumbai airport has two terminals, international and domestic. The international terminal, recently named Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport is at Sahar, 29 kms from the city centre at Nariman Point. The domestic terminal is 6 kms from the international terminal.

Airlines Offices

Indian Airlines
City Office Ph 2023031, Airport Ph 6156633

Jet Airways
City Office Ph 2855788, Airport Ph 6156666

Sahara India Airlines
City Office Ph 2835671, Airport Ph 6156363

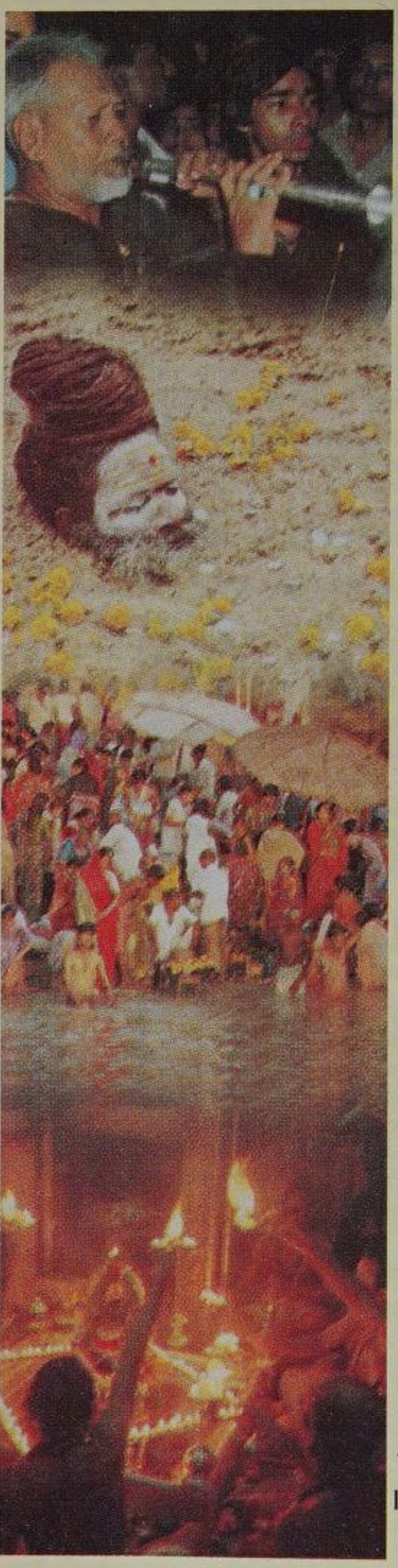
Air India
City Office Ph 2024142, Airport Ph 8366767

Tourist Information Offices

Tourist Office, Govt of India
123 M Karve Road
Ph 2032932 / 2033144

Tourist Office, Govt of UP
World Trade Centre, Cuffe Parade,
Colaba Ph 2185458.

Discover the energy that pulsates through a land as diverse as the people it attracts and find your rhythm here, among the elements.



Uttar Pradesh. Where every drummer marches to the beat of a different drum.

EARTH

As you wander through the pilgrim towns of Uttar Pradesh, you'll find many who wander with you. Seeking who knows what. Some find peace in religious rites. Some get their thrills following an adventure trail. And some, like this sanyasi find peace in the comforting arms of Mother Earth.

Follow the lure of Lord Krishna's flute to Braj Bhoomi

FIRE

Fan the embers of your faith. By joining in the famous Ganga Aarti. Watch the flames leap up high from the plate on which camphor burns brightly. And marvel at people whose faith holds strong through tests of fire.

AIR

Welcome to Uttar Pradesh. Home to classical musicians, singers and dancers. Actors and Prime Ministers. Poets and pundits. Here Ustaad Bismillah Khan, world-acclaimed maestro fills the air with the pure clear sound of the shehnai, as he plays on the streets of his native Banaras.

Take home some holy water from the Ganges, river of heaven.

WATER

Let your mind free float along the tranquil waters of the Ganges. And feel the peace of the land permeate your senses. Of course, whatever your faith or belief might be, your trip is incomplete without a dip in the holy water. Remember to take some home too, for good luck.

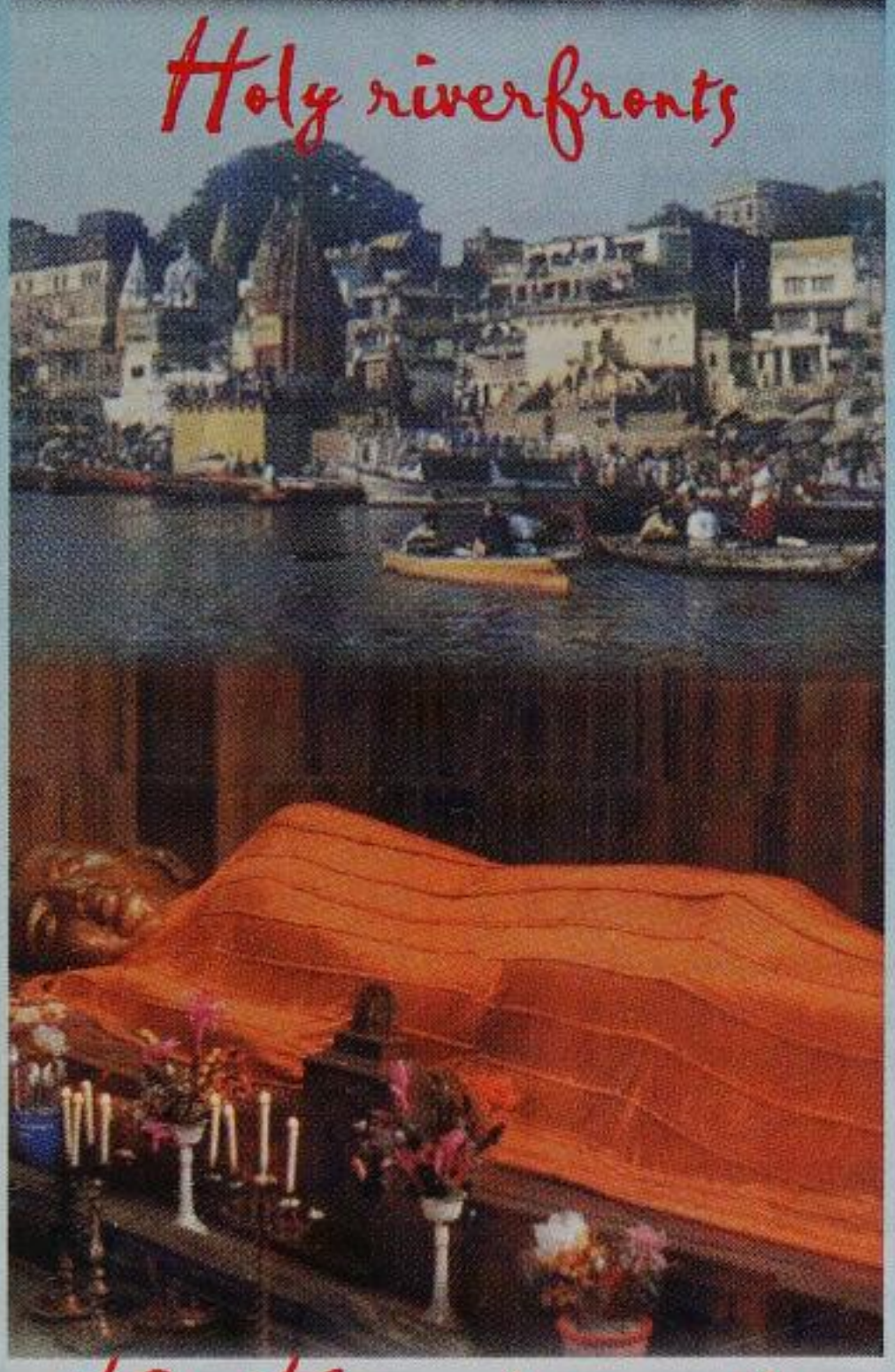
UTTAR PRADESH

The essence of India

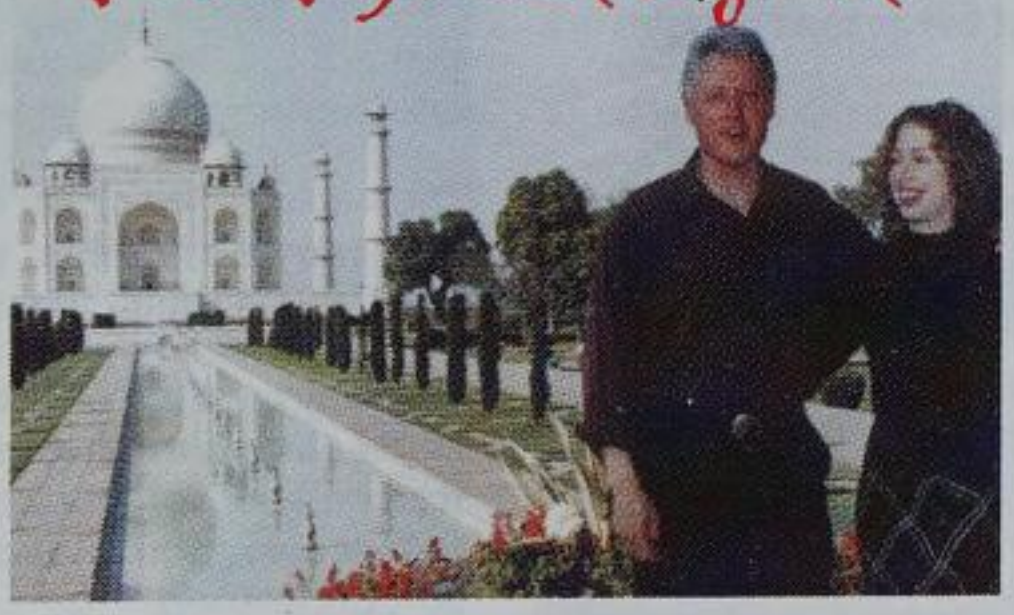
For information, please contact : **Directorate of Tourism,** Chitrahar Building, 3, Naval Kishore Road, Lucknow-226001(U.P.), INDIA. Tel: (91-522) 228349, 225165. Fax:(91-522) 221776.
E-mail : upstdc@sancharnet.in & yatrup@sancharnet.in **Visit our website at :** http://www.up-tourism.com

Historic Skylines

Holy riverfronts



The Taj, and beyond.



A land of many fascinations!

UTTAR PRADESH

The essence of India

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E-mail : upstdc@sancharnet.in & yatrup@sancharnet.in **Visit our website at :** http://www.up-tourism.com

naa/UPT/121A/2k

Transfer from Airports

Taxis: There are pre-paid taxi counters in the arrival area of all major airports. It is a good idea to hire a pre-paid taxi to avoid being over-charged.

Coaches: There are coach services for transfer into the city at most airport terminals.

Auto-rickshaws: They carry up to three passengers and are cheaper than cabs. They are available outside some Indian airports though the fare may have to be negotiated.

Travel within India

According to a recent study, there are over 15 different modes of transportation by which people manoeuvre their way around an Indian city, ranging from the latest model of the Mercedes Benz to the humble bullock cart. The level of noise in the streets of an Indian city may unnerve the first time visitor.

Airlines

There are several airlines that fly to domestic destinations. The biggest is the Indian Airlines, the state-owned domestic carrier. Other major flyers are Jet Airways and Sahara India Airlines

Hand Baggage: In all domestic flights, passengers are allowed one piece of hand baggage. All baggage is subject to security check whether carried by hand or booked in the hold.

Baggage Allowance: Domestic airlines allow 20 kgs check-in baggage for Economy Class and 30 kgs for Business Class. Excess baggage is charged as per the schedule available at the airlines counter.

Lost Articles

In case of loss or theft, especially vital documents like passports, an FIR (First Information Report) must be filed at the Police Station nearest to the place where the loss occurred. In case of loss of documents the embassy or high commission concerned must be immediately informed.

Police Assistance Booths

Police assistance booths are located at airports, railway stations and near the major bus stops.

Rail

The Indian Railways run a gigantic, modern and organised network which connects the metros to most major and minor destinations within India.

Ticket Reservation

Trains in India are very crowded and it is necessary to reserve a seat or a berth to travel in any degree of comfort.

Rail reservations start 60 days before the date of travel. Reservations can be cancelled up to 24 hours before the train leaves, but a nominal cancellation fee has to be paid.

Train tickets must be bought before you enter the train. You will be penalised if you do not have one and intend to buy it on board.

International Travel Bureau on the first floor of New Delhi Railway Station has a special booking office for foreigners. It is open Monday through Saturday, 7.30 am to 5 pm. Tickets here are issued only to foreign nationals and non-resident Indians against payment in US dollars.

Such tickets get a priority on reservation under the Foreign Tourist Quota and are exempted from the reservation fee.

The reporting time for domestic flights is 75 minutes prior to departure

Local Conveyance

Taxis and auto-rickshaws are available in all cities, although only those in the metros are metred. In other places, it is best to fix the rate beforehand. And to bargain.

The vehicles which do have metres will also carry a rate-chart that will allow you to calculate the actual amount to be paid.

The metros also have several kinds of taxis on their roads: yellow-topped taxis for city travel, and white tourist cars, both air-conditioned and non air-conditioned.

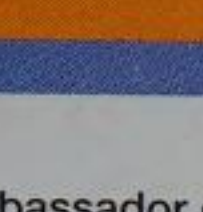
There are counters for pre-paid taxis in airports as well as outside major railway stations. It is a good idea to hire a pre-paid taxi to avoid being over-charged.

You can hire a private taxi for local and outstation tours at most hotels and airports. Within city limits, the rates are approximately Rs 450 for eight hours or 80 kms in a non air-conditioned

Ambassador car or Maruti van, and Rs 750 for an air-conditioned car. Outstation travel will cost you Rs 5.50 per km, provided you are travelling a minimum of 100 kms. Overnight charges are Rs 150 per night.

International car rental companies, as well as Indian private companies also run car-rental services. Most metros also have a dial-a-cab service.

It is probably not a good idea to take a bus for local travel – especially if you have luggage.



Auto-rickshaw

No visit to India can be complete without a ride on an auto-rickshaw – a three-wheeled, black-and-yellow canopied contraption. These little vehicles are allowed to carry up to three passengers at a time. Auto rides are no joy rides, especially over bumpy roads with no discretion shown for speed. They are, however, a cheap way to travel from point to point.

Cycle-rickshaw: Cycle-rickshaws are a common sight in most parts of urban and rural India.They are a convenient means of covering short distances. Not only do they precariously balance two to three people, but often carry merchandise as well.

Money

Indian Currency

Indian currency is called the Rupee. It is available in denominations of 1000, 500, 100, 50, 20, 10, 5, 2, 1. One rupee equals 100 paise. Coins in common use are those of Rs 5, Rs 2 , Re 1 and 50 and 25 paise. The 20, 10 and 5 paise coins have become redundant in big cities, but they still have value in smaller towns and in rural India.

Please be careful while changing currency and do not accept soiled notes.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are becoming increasingly popular in urban areas. All major international credit cards are used, Visa, Amex, Mastercard.

Banks

Banks are open from 10 am to 2 pm Monday to Friday and 10 am to 12 pm Saturdays. Banks are closed on Sundays and national holidays. Most international banks have branches in major cities.

Watch out for pickpockets, especially in crowded *bazaars* and on buses and trains.

Hospitals

Indian cities have government as well as privately run hospitals and nursing homes. The government hospitals have modern medical facilities but due to large patient turnout, medical assistance is slow.

Communications

Post Offices

The main post offices in large towns provide a wide range of facilities, like telegraph, fax and a courier service which operates under the brand name EMS-Speed Post.

If you need to dispatch a letter or document urgently it might be advisable to send it by the government-run Speed Post.

Parcels by mail should not exceed 20 kgs. Books, documents, papers and printed material can be sent by book post which costs less.

Most Post Offices are open from 10 am to 5 pm Monday to Saturday.

Email

Internet and email connections are easily available from anywhere in India. Varanasi has innumerable cybercafes, where for a nominal amount you can access the Net.

Telephone

ISD (international), STD (domestic long distance), and local telephone booths are available all over India.

The rates for international calls are fixed, but calls within the country are charged on the basis of a pulse rate which varies for different cities, and for different times of the day.

Most booths remain open till midnight. Some of these booths have facilities for sending and receiving fax messages.

STD Rates	
Full rate	9 am – 8 pm
Half rate	8 pm – 9.30 pm and 8 am – 9 am
One-third rate	9.30 pm – 11 pm and 6 am – 8 am
One-fourth rate	11 pm – 6 am

On Sundays and national holidays, half instead of full rate, is levied during the day.

Embassies & High Commissions in Delhi

Consular Offices in Chennai, Kolkata & Mumbai

Australia

1/50 G Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6888223 / 6885556
Fax 6874126

Chennai (044) 5341724
Kolkata (033) 2214618
Mumbai (022) 2186995

Austria

EP 13 Chandragupta Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6889050 / 6889049
Fax 6886929

Chennai (044) 8276036
Kolkata (033) 2403306
Mumbai (022) 2072046

Bangladesh

56 Ring Road
Lajpat Nagar III
Ph 6834668 / 6839209
Fax 6840596

Kolkata (033) 2475208

Belgium

50 N Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6875728 Fax 6885821

Chennai (044) 2352336
Kolkata (033) 2422409
Mumbai (022) 4974302

Bhutan

Chandragupta Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6889230 Fax 6876710

Kolkata (033) 2473159

Canada

7/8 Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6876500 Fax 6876579

Chennai (044) 8591402
Kolkata (033) 2209281
Mumbai (022) 2876027

China

50 D Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6871586 Fax 6885486

Mumbai (022) 2153532

Denmark

11 Aurangzeb Road
Ph 3010900 Fax 3792019

Chennai (044) 8113333
Kolkata (033) 2482411
Mumbai (022) 2618181

Finland

E 3 Nyaya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6115258 Fax 6886713

Chennai (044) 8523622
Kolkata (033) 2474328
Mumbai (022) 38663371

France

2/50 E Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6118790 Fax 6872305

Chennai (044) 8270469
Kolkata (033) 4791141
Mumbai (022) 4950918

Germany

6/50 G Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6871831 Fax 6877623

Chennai (044) 8271747
Kolkata (033) 4791141
Mumbai (022) 2832422

Greece

EP 32 Dr Radhakrishnan
Marg, Chanakyapuri
Ph 6880700 Fax 6888010

Chennai (044) 8273399
Mumbai (022) 8257036

Hungary

2/50 Neeti Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6114737 Fax 6886742

Mumbai (022) 2020224

Indonesia

50 A Kautilya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6118642 / 6118646
Fax 6874402

Chennai (044) 2341095
Kolkata (033) 2480109
Mumbai (022) 3868678

Iran

5 Barakhamba Road
Ph 3329600 Fax 3354093

Mumbai (022) 6360073

Ireland

13 Jor Bagh
Ph 4626714 Fax 4697053

Mumbai (022) 2872045

Israel

3 Aurangzeb Road
Ph 3013238 Fax 3014298

Kolkata (033) 2800028
Mumbai (022) 3862793

Italy

50 E Chandragupta Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6114355
Fax 6873889

Kolkata (033) 4792414
Mumbai (022) 3804071

Japan

50 G Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6876581
Fax 6885587

Chennai (044) 8265594
Kolkata (033) 2422241
Mumbai (022) 4933857

Kenya

66 Vasant Marg
Vasant Vihar
Ph 6146538 Fax 6146550

Kuwait

5A Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 4100791 Fax 6873516

Mumbai (022) 2871897

Malaysia

50 M Satya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6111291 / 6111292
Fax 6881538

Chennai (044) 4343048

Mongolia

34 Golf Links
Ph 4631728 Fax 4633240

Myanmar

3/50F Nyaya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6889007 Fax 6877942

Mauritius

5 Kautilya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 4102161 Fax 4102194

Chennai (044) 2346693
Mumbai (022) 2845466

Nepal

1 Barakhamba Road
Ph 3329218 Fax 3326857

Kolkata (033) 4791117

The Netherlands

6/50 F Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6884951 Fax 6884956

Chennai (044) 8240525
Kolkata (033) 2424979
Mumbai (022) 2016750

New Zealand

50 N Nyaya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6883170 Fax 6872317

Chennai (044) 8112472

Nigeria

21 Olof Palme Marg
Vasant Vihar
Ph 6146221 Fax 6146641

Norway

50/C Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6873573 / 6873532
Fax 6873814

Chennai (044) 5245314
Kolkata (033) 2478807
Mumbai (022) 2842042

Pakistan

2/50 G Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6110601 / 6110605
Fax 6872339

Philippines

Nyaya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6889091 Fax 6876401

Chennai (044) 2354063
Kolkata (033) 2808353
Mumbai (022) 2024792

Portugal

13 Sundar Nagar
Ph 4351262 Fax 4351252

Russia

Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6873800 Fax 6876823

Chennai (044) 4982330
Kolkata (033) 4797006
Mumbai (022) 3633628

Saudi Arabia

D12 NDSE II
Ph 6256419 Fax 6254444

Mumbai (022) 2182619

Singapore

E6 Chandragupta Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6885659 Fax 6886798

Chennai (044) 8276637
Kolkata (033) 2421406
Mumbai (022) 2023205

South Africa

B 18 Vasant Marg
Vasant Vihar
Ph 6149411 Fax 6143605

Kolkata (033) 2400950
Mumbai (022) 3893725

South Korea

9 Chandragupta Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 4679245 Fax 6884840

Kolkata (033) 2488220
Mumbai (022) 3886743

Spain

12 Prithviraj Road
Ph 3792085 Fax 3793375

Chennai (044) 4942008
Kolkata (033) 4692085
Mumbai (022) 2874797

Sri Lanka

27 Kautilya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 3010201 Fax 3793604

Chennai (044) 8270831
Kolkata (033) 2482912
Mumbai (022) 2045861

Sweden

Nyaya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 4197100 Fax 6885401

Chennai (044) 8112232
Kolkata (033) 2807136
Mumbai (022) 4212681

Switzerland

Nyaya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6878372 Fax 6873093

Chennai (044) 4332701
Kolkata (033) 2295542
Mumbai (022) 2884563

Thailand

56 N Nyaya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6118103 Fax 6872029

Mumbai (022) 3631404
Kolkata (033) 4407836

Turkey

50 N Nyaya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6889054 Fax 6881409

United Kingdom

Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 6872161 Fax 6872882

Chennai (044) 8273136
Kolkata (033) 2885172
Mumbai (022) 2830517

USA

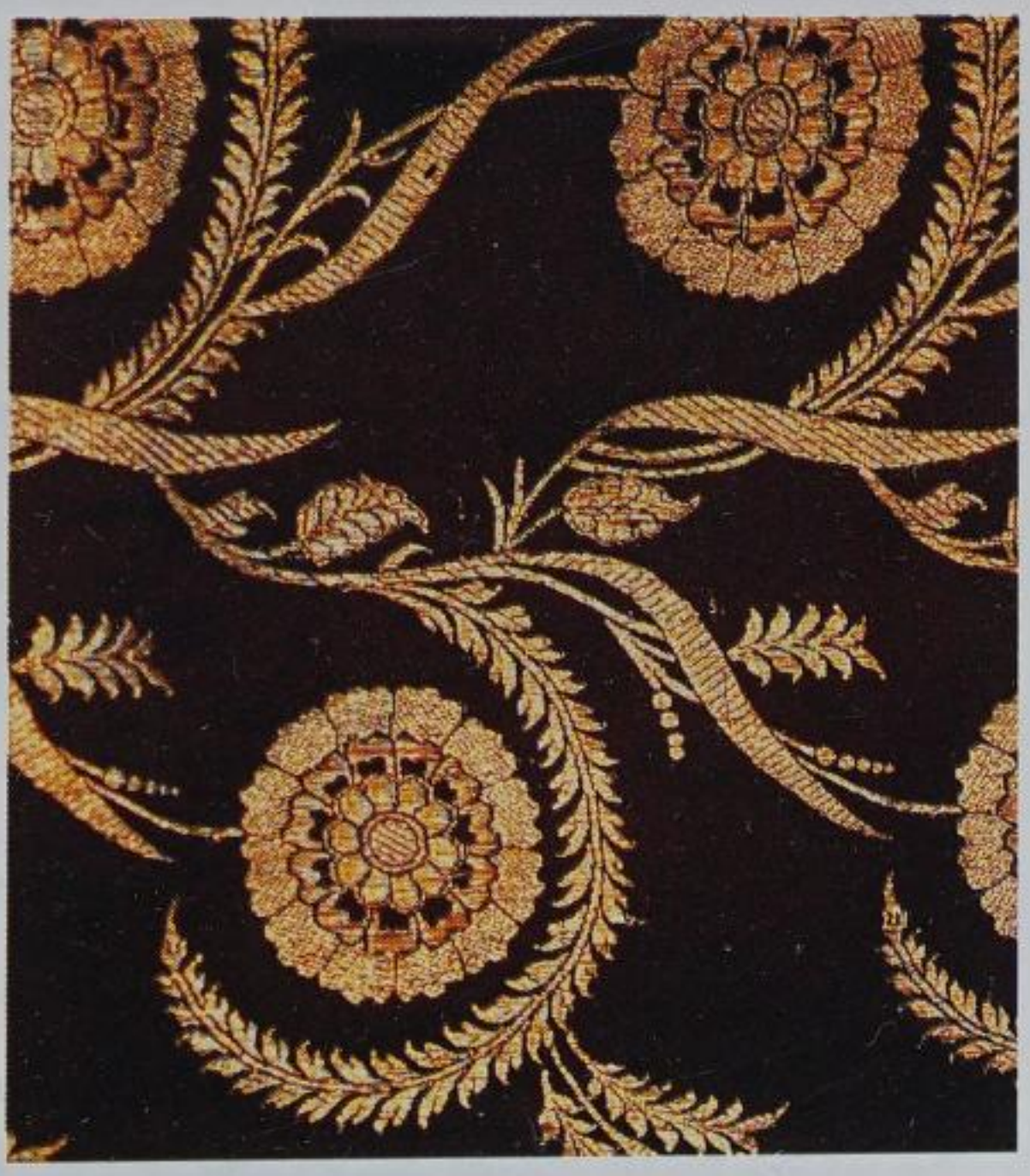
21 Shanti Path
Chanakyapuri
Ph 4198000 Fax 4190017

Chennai (044) 8112000
Kolkata (033) 2823611
Mumbai (022) 3633611

Vietnam

17 Kautilya Marg
Chanakyapuri
Ph 3010532 Fax 3017714

Mumbai (022) 6248538



UTTAR PRADESH

The essence of India

"The clock still ticks.
The family memories
are still chiming."

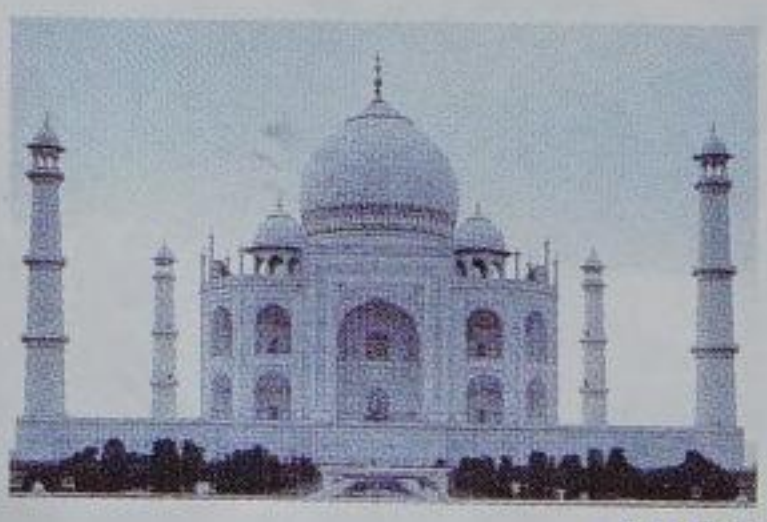
Discover your Roots !

In the 18th & 19th centuries, millions of Indians emigrated to foreign lands exploring new horizons and later acquired eminence & prosperity.

Are your ancestors one of them? If yes, then wouldn't you like to find that inseparable part of your existence - Your Roots left behind in your ancient land by your ancestors. The Village Chaupal, the Old Well, the Mango Tree, your father's Old School... all beckon you.

This is how : Mail us your recollections – names and addresses on old letters and photos, the name of a long lost cousin, personal histories... anything ! Our 'Roots Explorers' will take it on from there. Searching through records, contacting people, exploring deep, to complete the jigsaw and send it to you.

And if you wish, we can also chalk out a Root Route for you, so that some day you can actually come down for a traditional welcome to your village and relive the past in your ancestral land.



AGRA

VARANASI

For details,visit our website
http://www.up-tourism.com

Explore your heritage in Uttar Pradesh, India!

For information, please contact : **Directorate of Tourism,** Chitrahar Building,
3, Naval Kishore Road, Lucknow-226001(U.P.), INDIA.
Tel: (91-522) 228349, 225165. Fax:(91-522) 221776.
E-mail : upstdc@sancharnet.in & yatrup@sancharnet.in
Visit our website at : http://www.up-tourism.com

naa/UPT/139/2k

Along the holy trail of the *Tirthankaras* for a divine holiday experience!

In the 26th Birth Centenary Year of Lord Mahavira, travel along the footsteps of the great Jain Tirthankaras in Uttar Pradesh.

In Uttar Pradesh, there is festive fervour at the fabled sites associated with the life, miracles and teachings of the Bhagwan Mahavira and the divine Tirthankaras, as U P Tourism joins the Jain world in celebrating the 26th Janm Shatabdi Kalyanak of Lord Mahavira.

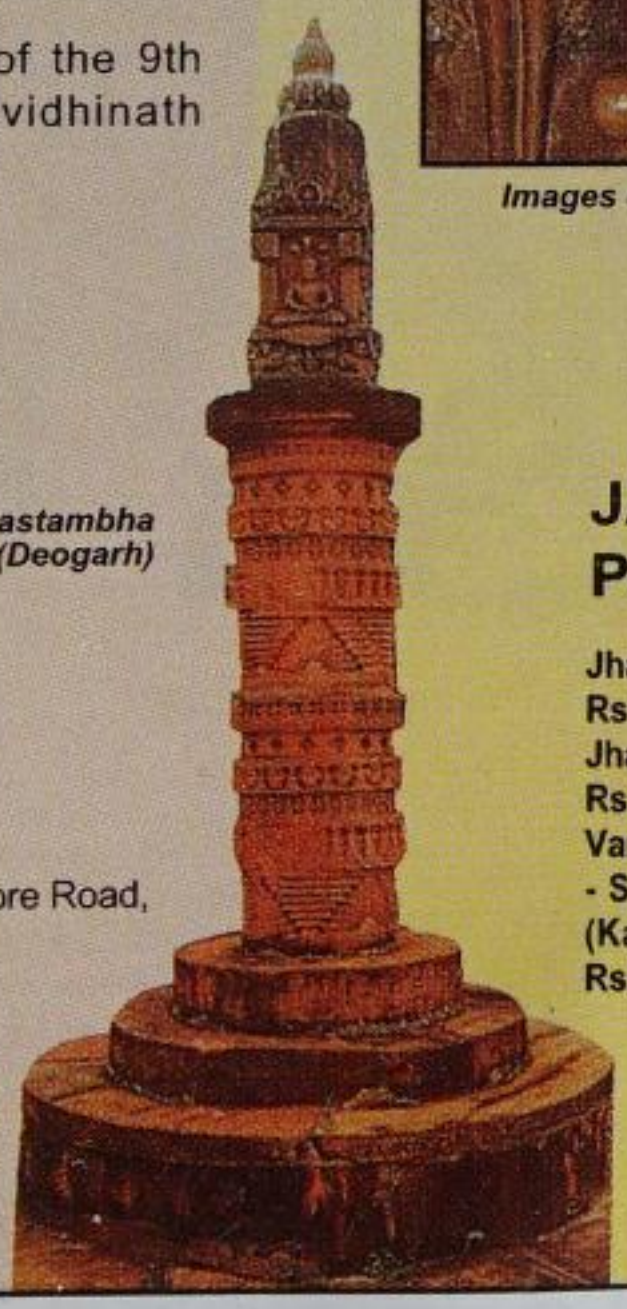
- **Ayodhya -** the birth place of the 1st Tirthankara Lord Rishabhnath; the 2nd, Lord Ajithanath; the 4th Lord Abhinandanath; and the 5th, Lord Sumatinath
- **Varanasi** - the birth place of the 7th Tirthankara Lord Suparshvanath and the 23rd Tirthankara Sri Parshvanath
- **Kaushambi** - the home of the 6th Tirthankara Lord Padmaprabhu
- **Shravasti** - the holy city of the 3rd Tirthankara Lord Sambhavanath and the famous Sobhanath Temple
- **Deogarh** - *'the fort of the Gods'*, famous for its ancient Jain sculptures, artefacts and temples
- **Mahoba** - the historic town famous for its 24 dramatic rock-cut Tirthankara images on Gokhar Hill
- **Kakandi** - the home of the 9th Tirthankara Lord Suvidhinath

Special Attraction:

'Tirthankara Circuit' Tours & Join *JAIN MELAS*

Images of Tirthankaras at Gokhar Hill, Mahoba

Images of Jain Tirthankaras, Deogarh



Manastambha (Deogarh)

UTTAR PRADESH
The essence of India

For information, please contact:
Directorate of Tourism,
Chitrahar Building, 3, Naval Kishore Road,
Lucknow-226001(U.P.), INDIA.
Tel: (91-522) 228349, 225165.
Fax:(91-522) 221776.
E-mail : upstdc@sancharnet.in &
yatrup@sancharnet.in
Visit our website at:
http://www.up-tourism.com

JAIN PILGRIMAGE PACKAGE TOURS

Jhansi - Matatila - Deogarh (1 Day): Rs.700/-
Jhansi - Matatila - Deogarh (2 Days): Rs.1550/-
Varanasi - Kushinagar - Pawanagar - Shravasti - Ayodhya - Allahabad (Kaushambi) - Varanasi (5 Days): Rs.7100/-

***Rates per person inclusive of travel and accommodation**
****It will be a 'On-Request' tour***

naa/UPT/539/01

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Arriving in Varanasi

Arriving by Air

Varanasi Airport is at Babatpur, 22 kms from Varanasi Railway Station and 26 kms from the city centre at Godoulia. Varanasi is connected by air to Lucknow, Delhi, Agra, Mumbai, Khajuraho and Kathmandu. It is advisable to hire a taxi at the airport for transfer to the city centre, as the bus service is often erratic.

Airport Enquiry Ph 343742

Air connections from Varanasi

Destination	Flight No	Frequency	Via
Agra	CD7408	1/3/5/7	Khajuraho
Bangalore	S2 521/503	Daily	Delhi
Chennai	S2 521/541	Daily	Delhi
Delhi	9W 724	Daily	—
	S2 521	Daily	—
	CD7408	1/3/5/7	Khajuraho & Agra
	IC 805	Daily	Lucknow
Kathmandu	IC 752	2/6	—
Khajuraho	9W 723	Daily	—
	CD7408	1/3/5/7	—
Lucknow	IC 805	Daily	—
Mumbai	S2 521/507	Daily	Delhi
	IC 805	Daily	Lucknow & Delhi

Monday 1 • Tuesday 2 • Wednesday 3 • Thursday 4 Friday 5 • Saturday 6 • Sunday 7

Airlines Offices

Indian Airlines (IA)
52 Yadunath Marg,
Cantonment.
Ph 343746 / 345959
Airport Ph 622090 / 622494

Alliance Air (CD),
A subsidiary of Indian Airlines, also operates from Varanasi

Sahara India Airlines (S2)
Mint House Motel, Nadesar,
Cantonment
Ph 343094/511489
Airport Ph 622334 / 622547

Jet Airways (9W)
1st Floor
Krishnayatan Building
The Mall, Cantonment
Ph 511444 / 511555
Airport Ph 622795-97

Arriving by Train

Varanasi Railway Station is in the Cantonment area. Sixteen kms from Varanasi is another important railway station, Mughal Sarai Junction. Both these stations are well-connected by the North Eastern railway to all the major cities. Both of them have fully computerised Reservation Centres. The booking office is open all days of the week from 8 am to 8 pm. There is left-luggage facility at both Varanasi and Mughal Sarai Railway Stations. Both are open 24 hours.

Varanasi Railway Station Enquiry
Ph 131 / 135

Railway Reservation
Ph 348031

Mughal Sarai Junction Enquiry
Ph (05412) 55703 / 55782

Some important train connections for Varanasi

Train connection	Train Nos – Up/Dn	Train Name
New Delhi – Varanasi	4057 / 4058	Kashi Vishwanath Express
Patna – New Delhi	2309 / 2310	Patna Rajdhani Express
Chennai – Varanasi	6039 / 6040	Ganga Kaveri Express
Pune – Varanasi	1031 / 1032	Pune Varanasi Express
Secunderabad – Varanasi	7092 / 7091	Secunderabad Varanasi Express
Howrah – New Delhi	2301 / 2302	Howrah Rajdhani Express
Puri – New Delhi	8475 / 8476	Neelachal Express (via Mughal Sarai)
New Delhi – Patna	2402 / 2401	Shramjeevi Express
Lucknow – Varanasi	4228 / 4227	Varuna Express
Delhi – Muzzafarpur	4008 / 4007	Sadbhavana Express

*Not all the trains run daily. It is advisable to check in advance.

Arriving by Road

Varanasi is situated at the junction of National Highways NH2, NH7 and NH29, and is well connected by National Highways to Kolkata and Patna and by State Highways to all major towns of Uttar Pradesh.

Bus

There are two bus stands in Varanasi, one on Sher Shah Suri Marg, in the Cantonment area and the other one is at Godoulia.

UP Roadways operates bus services from both the bus stands to Allahabad, Gorakhpur and Lucknow.

- **UP Roadways Enquiry**
  Ph 342011 / 343476 (open 24 hours)
- **UP Roadways Enquiry**
  Golgadda Ph 330740

Private deluxe buses are also available, but it is advisable to personally check timings and fares at least a day in advance of travel.

Local Transport

Metered black-and-yellow taxis are not available in Varanasi. Most hotels will be able to arrange chauffeured cars for hire on an hourly or kilometre charge basis. Local city buses cover most parts of Varanasi but are often very crowded and uncomfortable. Three-wheeled auto-rickshaws are available in most places. Cycle-rickshaws and horse-drawn carriages (*tongas*) are commonly used. It is advisable to fix rates before travel. Try to find out the going rate for the journey from local people and negotiate a fair price before starting.

Boats

The best way to enjoy Varanasi is by boat. Boats are available at most ghats. Approximate rate for hiring a small boat from Assi Ghat to Manikarnika Ghat and back is around Rs 150, depending on the time of the day and the demand.

Important road distances	
Agra	565 kms
Allahabad	125 kms
Bodh Gaya (via Mohania)	243 kms
Delhi	765 kms
Gorakhpur	212 kms
Kaushambi	190 kms
Kolkata	681 kms
Kushinagar	263 kms
Lucknow	286 kms
Patna (via Mohania)	246 kms
Sarnath	10 kms
Sonauli (Nepal border)	308 kms

Foreigners' Registration Office, Srinagar Colony, Sithgiri Bagh Ph 351968

Tourist Information Centres

Tourist Office, Govt of India
15B The Mall, Cantonment Ph 343744

Tourist Office, Govt of Bihar
Englishiya Market, Sher Shah Suri Marg
Ph 343821

Tourist Office, Govt of UP
Parade Kothi, Cantonment
Ph 208413 / 208545 / 208162

Tourist Information Counter, Govt of UP
Varanasi Rly Station Ph 346370 / 346370

Tourist Information Counter
Govt of India
Varanasi Airport, Babatpur

Travel Agencies

Cosmic Travels and Movers
Varuna Bridge Ph 346726

Impac Tours
Nadesar Ph 345781

Mercury Travels
Cantonment Ph 343296

Sarnath Travels
Cantonment Ph 360089

Shashi Travels
Hotel Temple Town, Cantonment Ph 348248

Sita World Travels
53 Cantonment
Ph 343421 / 348455 / 344692

Surbhi Tours & Travels
Cooperative Building, Nadesar Ph 348632

Travel Corpn of India
Sridas Foundation,
S-20, 51-5 & S20/52-4 Mall Road
Ph 346210 / 346209 / 341929

Varuna Travels
Pandey Haveli, Ph 393371-2

Indian Tourism Development Corporation
Hotel Varanasi Ashok
Ph 342565 / 346020

Conducted Tours

Most of the travel agencies arrange conducted tours on the Buddhist Circuit. Approved tourist guides for local sightseeing from Tourist Office, Govt of UP.

1-4 tourists full day	:	Rs 350
5-15 tourists full day	:	Rs 500
16-35 tourists full day	:	Rs 750

Guides speaking foreign languages can be hired by paying a little extra.

Roadways Enquiry

UP Roadways Bus Stand
Sher Shah Suri Marg, Cantonment
Ph 342011 / 343476

UP Roadways Bus Stand
Golgadda Ph 330740

Both are open 24 hours and run frequent services to Allahabad, Gorakhpur and Lucknow. Deluxe buses are also available.

Authorised Money Changers

- **State Bank of India** (SBI)
  Near Hotel Surya, Cantonment
- **State Bank of India**
  Hotel de Paris
- **State Bank of India**
  Hotel Clarks Varanasi
- **State Bank of India**
  Hotel Varanasi Ashok
- **Indian Overseas Bank**
  Lahurabir

Timings:
Monday to Friday 10 am to 2 pm
Saturday 10 am to12 am

Hospitals & Nursing Homes

Ashirwad Nursing Home
Birdopur Ph 560146

Birla Hospital
Machhodari Ph 56357

Cancer Hospital*
NE Railway, Lahertara Ph 342538

Civil Hospital*
Shivpur Ph 382226

Dr Gautam Chakravarti Orthopaedic Nursing Home, Guru Bagh Ph 32177

Hindu Seva Sadan
Chowk Ph 352456

Mata Anand Mai Hospital
Bhadeni Ph 310592

Ram Krishna Mission Hospital*
Luxa Road Ph 321727

Rajkiya Hospital*
Shivpur Ph 382226

Shiv Prasad Gupta Hospital*
Kabir Chaura Ph 214723 / 214720

Sir Sunder Lal Hospital*
Banaras Hindu University
Ph 316833 / 307570 / 307550

Shubam Nursing Home
Chandrika Colony Ph 561333

Singh Medical & Research Centre
Maldahiya Ph 342644

The Heritage Hospital
Near Banaras Hindu University

Uphaar Nursing Home
Mehmergunj Ph 360370

*Government hospitals

Communications

Head Post Office
Bisheshwarganj and Cantonment

Post Offices are open 9.30 am to 5.30 pm and the Telegraph Office from 9.30 am to 4.30 pm.

There are **STD and ISD** booths in all localities that are open from 8 am to 11 pm.

Varanasi has innumerable cybercafes, where for a nominal amount you can access the Internet and email.

Major courier services

Blue Dart Express
Sriram Shopping Complex, Maldahiya
Ph 357268 / 3589964

DHL Worldwide Express
Shiva Complex Ph 9154361 / 412

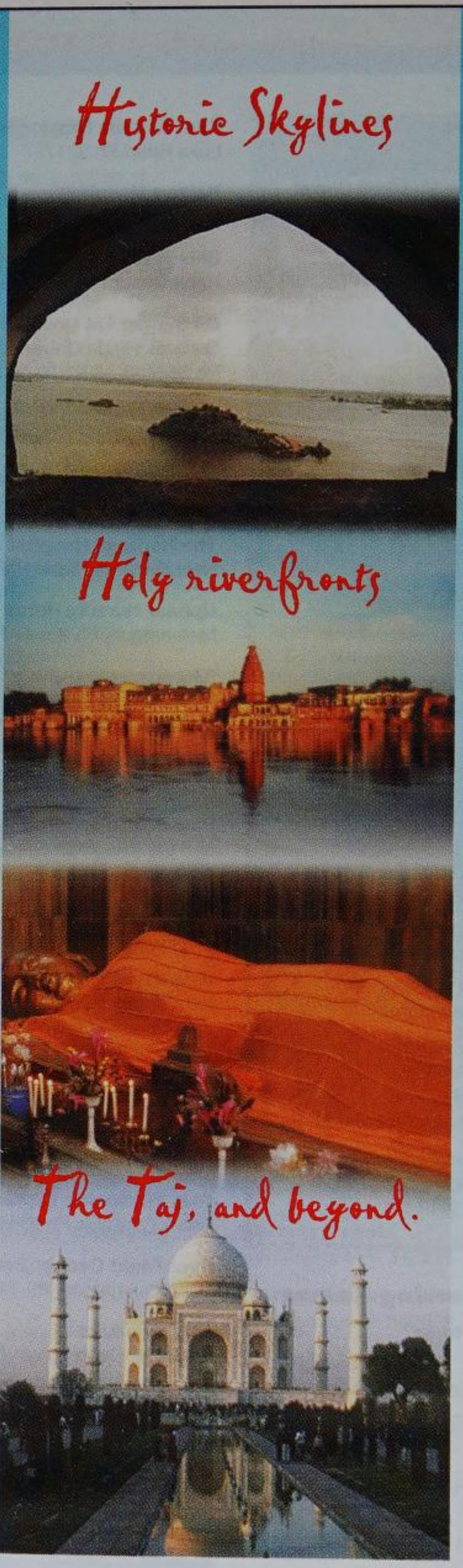
First Flight Courier Service Ltd
22/208 Jagatganj Ph 342382 / 340598

City Airlinkers
The Mall, Cantonment Ph 344214

Important Phone Numbers

Varanasi STD Code : 0542

Police Control Room	Ph 100
Ambulance	Ph 102
Fire	Ph 101
Police (SSP)	Ph 348040
District Magistrate	Ph 348585
Banaras Hindu University	Ph 310290
Foreigners' Registration Office	Ph 351968



A land of many fascinations!

UTTAR PRADESH

The essence of India

For information, please contact : **Directorate of Tourism,** Chitrahar Building, 3, Naval Kishore Road, Lucknow-226001(U.P.), INDIA. Tel: (91-522) 228349, 225165. Fax:(91-522) 221776.
E-mail : upstdc@sancharnet.in & yatrup@sancharnet.in **Visit our website at :** http://www.up-tourism.com

naa/UPT/121A/2k

Where to Stay

Varanasi has a wide range of accommodation – from deluxe five-star and middle-range hotels, to the most basic rudimentary lodging houses that offer a bed and a common shared bathroom. These down-market tourist lodges in crowded localities, are really inexpensive but offer minimal amenities. There are also some guest houses and *dharmashalas* that are extremely clean, offer good service and comfortable stay.

Two well-known Indian hotel chains – the Taj and the Clarks groups – offer services that are more than a match for international hotel chains. Although expensive (Rs 3000 and more for a standard double room), the top-end hotels are reliable and offer impeccable service. What makes them special is the Indian brand of hospitality offered.

The deluxe five-star hotels offer facilities comparable to those available in this category worldwide. These include, swimming pools, tennis courts, health clubs, shopping arcades, gardens, 24-hour coffee shops and well-equipped business centres. Most of these hotels have a number of speciality restaurants that are among the best in the city. Tourists, of course, feel pampered in these plush hotels, but business travellers too find them extremely comfortable. The business centres in these hotels provide round-the-clock service, which include efficient secretarial service and facility to send and receive faxes and emails at any time. Single and double rooms have desks with telephone, and in some cases, fax machines. Separate lounges, complimentary breakfast and happy hours at the bar all add to the feel-good factor.

Air and train bookings can be made from hotels, either by in-house travel agencies or resourceful hotel staff. Cars are available for hire – tour and travel agencies also arrange local sightseeing tours with multi-lingual guides.

Noise levels in Varanasi are, by and large, pretty high and sound-proofing in middle-level or budget hotels is not exactly great. So, if you are staying in crowded areas, it would be a good idea to ask for a room away from the road. Promises made at the front desk in such hotels often prove to be inaccurate. So it would be a good idea to personally check out the room, whether it really has hot and cold running water, the condition of the toilet, room service and general cleanliness.

Most Varanasi hotels are not equipped to provide adequate facilities for the disabled, like wheelchairs, ramp at the hotel entrance and lifts at the ground level. Some top-end hotels may offer these facilities, but most middle-level and budget hotels do not.

For the convenience of the first-time traveller to Varanasi, here is an attempt to classify hotels based on tariffs. We hope this will assist the reader to choose his place of stay. We would like to clarify that these are not recommendations but merely a listing.

It is advisable to book your accommodation in advance as availability in the busy tourist season is difficult. You may book directly by letter or fax, or indirectly with the help of your travel agent. Some credit cards offer hotel booking service, so do check out if yours does.

The checking-out hour is usually 12 noon, although some hotels do it according to 24 hours of stay. So, do ask in advance. It is also advisable to verify bills and retain receipts.

Taxes Levied

Do remember that over and above the room rent, the government levies a hotel entertainment tax on air-conditioned hotels and an additional luxury tax in case of five-star hotels. If you are not an Indian passport holder, it would be advisable to find out whether your hotel, accepts payment only in foreign exchange or at the dollar rate which would mean an additional amount over the rupee rate.

Hotels offer discounts during off-season, but not if you do not bargain for it; for, even in the hot summer months when fewer tourists come to Varanasi it is common for hotels to first offer the printed official tariff. All hotels, especially the smaller ones, give discounts for tourist groups and children.

Apart from hotels, there are other options that one may consider when selecting a place to stay – *dharmashalas* run by Hindu religious trusts, and railway retiring rooms. Retiring rooms are available at Varanasi Railway Station for upper-class train passengers with valid tickets. There are also dormitory facilities and youth hostels for students and travellers.

- **Railway Retiring Rooms**
  Cantt Rly Station Ph 131 / 135
- **YMCA**
  Ph 355895
- **International Guest House**
  Ph 362558 / 364491
- **Circuit House**
  Ph 511223

Hotels & Guest Houses

No. of AC Rooms — No. of Non AC Rooms
Credit Card — In house restaurant
Price Range: (for a Standard Doubler Room)
Above Rs. 1500 (A) — Rs. 750 – Rs. 1500 (B)
Below Rs. 750 (C)

Clarks Tower
The Mall, Cantt
Ph 348509, Fax 348969
Distance from Airport 21 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 3 kms
58 — A

Clarks Varanasi
The Mall
Ph 348501 / 3424012
Fax 3481868
Distance from Airport 23 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 3.5 kms
140 — A

De Paris
15, The Mall, Cantt
Ph 346601 / 348016
Fax 348520
Distance from Airport 23 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 3 kms
15 — 35 — A

Hindustan International
C-21/3 Maldahiya
Ph 351484, Fax 350931
Distance from Airport 25 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 1 kms
85 — A

Kashika Best Western
The Mall, Cantt
Telefax 348091 / 2
Distance from Airport 23 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 3.5 kms
40 — A

Taj Ganges
Nadesar Palace , Cantt
Ph 345100 / 342480
Fax 348067
Distance from Airport 23.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 2.5 kms
130 — A

Varanasi Ashok
The Mall, Cantt
Ph 346020 Fax 348089
Distance from Airport 23 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 3.5 kms
84 — A

Alka
Mirghat
Ph 328445 / 328474
Distance from Airport 26 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 3.5 kms
04 — 11 — B

Diamond Hotel
B-20/44 Bhelupura
Ph 310696, Fax 310703
Distance from Airport 30 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 5 kms
33 — 08 — B

Ganges View
Assi Ghat
Ph 313218, Fax 313965
Distance from Airport 32 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 7 kms
04 — 09 — B

GM Guest House
Chandrika Colony
Ph 361292
Distance from Airport 26.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 1.5 kms
07 — 16 — B

India
59 Patel Nagar, Cantt
Ph 342912 / 343309
Fax 348327
Distance from Airport 23.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 1.5 kms
80 — B

MM Continental
The Mall, Cantt
Ph 345272/3, Fax 342639
Distance from Airport 23 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 3 kms
21 — 07 — B

Pallavi International
Hathwa Place, Chetganj
Ph 356939
Distance from Airport 25.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 1.5 kms
25 — 19 — B

Pradeep
Jagatganj
Ph 204963 / 204594
Distance from Airport 25 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 2 kms
32 — 04 — B

Radiant YMCA
Tourist Hostel
28A Sampoornanand Nagar, Sigra
Ph 31363928, Fax 320676
Distance from Airport 27.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 2.5 kms
11 — B

Alaknanda Guest House
Ph 327177
Distance from Airport 29.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 4.5 kms
07 — C

Ashok
Vidyapith Road, Sigra
Ph 354391
Distance from Airport 26 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 1 km
16 — 14 — C

Baradari
Maidagin
Ph 330040, Fax 330581
Distance from Airport 27 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 3.5 kms
10 — 05 — C

Dak Bungalow
Caravan Park
The Mall, Cantt
Ph 342182
Distance from Airport 23 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 3 kms
13 — C

Garden View
Vidyapith Road
Ph 361093
Distance from Airport 26 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 1 km
09 — C

Gautam
Ramkatora, Ph 346450
Distance from Airport 25.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 2 kms
09 — 27 — C

Hotel Buddha
C-26/35, Lahurabir
Ph 343686 / 344378
Fax 511020
Distance from Airport 25 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 2 kms
01 — 20 — C

Lara India
Dasashwamedh Road
Ph 320323 Fax 352221
Distance from Airport 27.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 3 kms
11 — 17 — C

Malti
C-31/3 Vidyapeeth Road
Ph 356844 / 351395
Fax 322161
Distance from Airport 26 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 0.25 km
15 — 32 — C

Puja Guest House
D1/45 Lalita Ghat,
Ph 326102
Distance from Airport 29.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 5 kms
38 — C

Varanasi also has a quieter, less crowded part, locally referred to as Cantonment or Cantt. Suitably far from the frenzied crowds of the city's bazaars and galis, the British built their Cantonment and Civil Lines for their officers and men. This area once had wide tree-lined roads and sprawling bungalows set in gardens.

The Cantt area no longer has the laid-back ambience of the colonial times, having been overtaken by indiscriminate building activity, but compared to the old city, it remains less disorganised.

Pushpanjali
Lahurabir, Ph 343776
Distance from Airport 25 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 2 kms
10

River View
Brahma Ghat, Ph 334565
Distance from Airport 29 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 5.5 kms
06

Sandhya Guest House
Near Shivala Ghat PO
Ph 313292
Distance from Airport 30 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 6 kms
09

Scindia Guest House
Scindia Ghat, Ph 320319
Distance from Airport 30 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 5 kms
02 19

Shanti Guest House
8/129 Garwasi Tola,
Manikarnika Ghat
Ph 322568
Distance from Airport 30 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 5 kms
51

Sun Shiv
Ravi Niketan, Jaddumandi
Road, Ph 350468
Distance from Airport 27.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 2.5 kms
14

Surya
Varuna Bridge Road, Cantt
Ph 343014
Distance from Airport 23 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 3 kms
12 20

Tandon House Lodge
Gai Ghat, Ph 331223
Distance from Airport 31 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 7 kms
12

Temple on Ganges
Near Assi Ghat
Ph 312340, Fax 312740
Distance from Airport 31 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 6 kms
01 25

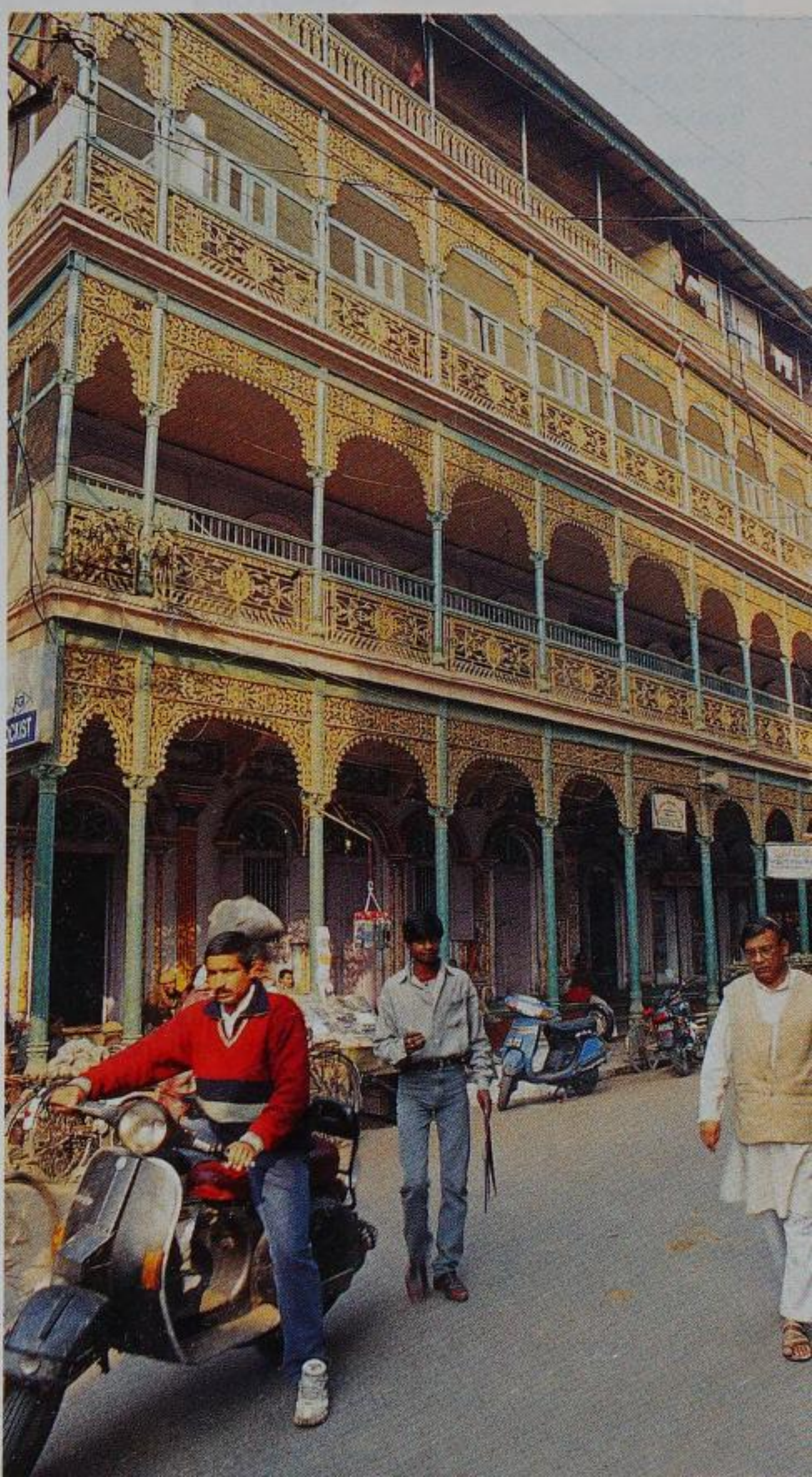
Tourist Bungalow
Parade Kothi,
Opp. Cantt Railway Station
Ph 343413 / 344545
Fax 346466l
Distance from Airport 25 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 0.25 km
08 31

Trimurti Guest House
Near Golden Temple
Ph 323554
Distance from Airport 29.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 5 kms
28

Trimurti Lodge
Near Golden Temple
Ph 323554
Distance from Airport 30 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 4.5 kms
25

Vaibhav
56 Patel Nagar, Cantt
Ph 346588
Distance from Airport 23.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 1.5 kms
49 09

Yogi Lodge
D8/29 Kalika Gali
Ph 332258
Distance from Airport 29.5 kms
Distance from Cantt RS 5 kms
15



Dharmashalas

Varanasi has more than 35 *dharmashalas* run by Hindu religious trusts. Almost all offer both rooms and dormitory facilities. There is no practice of reserving accommodation in *dharmashalas*. The traveller is advised to check at the dharmashala on arrival in Varanasi. *Dharmashalas* usually give accommodation to people of Indian origin.

Vireshwar Pande Dharmashala
D 47/200 Luxa Road
Ph 320862, (Rooms 30)

Karamal Savi Devi
D 48/142 Mishra Pokhar
Ph 358441
(Rooms 17; Dormitory 1)

Annapurna Telwala
D 53/98 Luxa Road
Ph 404225
(Rooms 20; Dormitory 2)

Baranwala
CK 65/11 Bari Piari
Ph 355801
(Rooms 27; Dormitory 1)

Revabai Shankar Hindu
K 61/129, Bulanala
(Rooms 24; Dormitory 1)

Khunkhunji
K 62/77 Bulanala
Ph 354704 (Rooms 29)

Sri Krishna
S 21/1 Englishiya Lane
Ph 346164, (Rooms 45)

Maharashtriyan
D 17/91 Dasashwamedh Ghat, (Rooms 22)

Seth Jagan Prasad Doodhwawala
K 62/96 Bulanala
Ph 354670, (Rooms 23)

Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel Smarak Smriti Bhawan
S 14/83 Andhra Pul
Ph 346221
(Rooms 50; Dormitory 2)

Maheshwari
K 62/98 Bulanala
Ph 354134
(Rooms 12; Dormitory 1)

Karnataka Guest House
B 4/52 Hanuman Ghat
Ph 313422, (Rooms 10)

Note: Lists supplied by UP Tourism Office, Parade Kothi, Cantonment

Paying Guest Accomodation

Neeti Prakash Dubey
D-24/14, Pandey Ghat
Ph 321256

VP Tripathi
B-3/131 A, Shivala
Ph 311706

Harisharan Prasad
B-16/14, Pandey Haweli
Ph321227

Geeta Pandey
B-1/182, Assi
Ph 311427

Virendra Nath Sharma
B-1/205, Assi
Ph 315026

Rajendra Prasad Pathak
D-5/46, Tripura Bhairvi
Ph 392369

Jamuna Lal Jain
14/37, Baraipur, Sarnath
Ph 585621

Shubha Verma
C-32/4, Vidya Peeth Road
Ph220841

Ganesh Ojha
B-1/152-2K-1, Assi
Ph 314950

Vijay Shankar Verma
B-1/128-23, Bhadeni
Ph 310637

Vishwanath Tripathi
B-2/262-1, Bhadeni
Ph310932

Sharle Lans
Lal Kothi, Susuvahi, Lanka
Ph 316501

Pushpa Singh
Om home,B-3/97, Shivala
Ph 312234

Lalmani Devi
B-22/234, Shojavan
Ph 311409

Hriday Prakash Tiwari
B-2/43, Bhadeni
Ph 313933

Amarnath Pandey
SN-15/132, B-6,
Harnarayan Vihar Colony
Mavaiya, Sarnath

Deepak Maheshwari
SA-6/374, Pahariya, Sarnath
Ph 585352

Indra Dev Singh
AG-8, Har Narayan Vihar
Mavaiya, Sarnath
Ph 586792

Johan Shahi
14/67-A-4, Sarnath
Ph 586162

Sarnath

Sarnath is only 10 kms from the city of Varanasi. The nearest railway stations on the main lines are Varanasi (12 kms) and Mughal Sarai Junction (15 kms).

Where to Stay

There are monasteries in Sarnath which provide low cost accommodation. These monasteries give preference to the tourists from their respective countries. There are rules and regulations in the monasteries, which is to be followed by the guests. Please check by telephone the availability of rooms before hand.

Budget hotels

(Below Rs 750 for a standard double room)

Chitra Vihar
Ph 586280

Forest Dept Guest House
Ph 587841

Hotel Golden Buddha
Ph 587933

Mahabodhi Guest House
Ph 585595

Hotel Mrigadava
UP Tourism Dev. Corpn.
Ph 586965

Puran Chandra Mishra
C-14/89-A, Ashok Marg
Sarnath, Ph 585407

Shailendra Kumar Tiwari
28, Lohiya Nagar, Ashapur
Sarnath

Ravindra Kumar
B-1/249, Assi, Ph 313790

Shyam Vardhan Shah
B-27/66, Durga Kund
Ph 312243

Shiv Shankar Prasad
D-7/9, Shakarkand Gali
Ph 392582

Neerja Garg
B-32/32-44, Saket Nagar
Sankatmochan
Ph 312125

Radhika Devi
C-33/58, B-2 C
Bajrang Nagar Colony
Ph 220918

Where to Eat

Most restaurants offering a multi-cuisine menu are located in the hotels in the Cantonment area. The restaurants in the crowded Ghats area offer mainly reasonably priced Indian food. Varanasi offers food from all parts of India. If the traveller is adventurous about food, it may be worth sampling the Indian food offered at these restaurants. Like in other Indian cities, the restaurants in Varanasi are varied – not only in their ambience, or the lack of it, but also in their rates.

The Guesthouses and *Dharmashalas* located near the *Ghats* provide food only for residents.

Here we give a list of the better-known restaurants in the city. The list has been broadly divided into restaurants in the Cantonment area and those in the Ghats area, as to make it convenient to find an eatery close to where you are staying or working.

The food in Varanasi is cheaper than in metros like Delhi and Bombay. In our list, each restaurant comes with a mention of its speciality cuisine. A sumptuous meal for two could cost anything from Rs 150 to over Rs 800!

Read on and make your choices.

Restaurants

Cantonment Area

Achchar Chatni (Indian)
Kashika Best Western
The Mall, Telefax 348091 / 2
B

Amrapali (Indian)
Clarks Varanasi, The Mall
Ph 348501 / 3424012
Fax 3481868
A

Adit (Indian)
Varanasi Ashok, The Mall
Ph 346020, Fax 348089
A

Mela (Indian)
MM Continental, The Mall
Ph 345272 / 3, Fax 342639
B

Mandap (Indian)
Taj Ganges, Nadesar Palace
Ph 345100 -18, 3424480
Fax 348067
A

Nauratna (Indian)
De Paris, 15 The Mall
Ph 346601 / 348016
Fax 348520
B

Palki (Indian)
Vaibhav, 56 Patel Nagar
Cantt, Ph 346588 / 34677
C

Palm Springs (Indian)
Hotel India, 59 Patel Nagar
Ph 342912 / 343309
Fax 348327
B

Maldahiya / Lahurabir Area

Isha (Indian / Chinese)
Malti,
C-31/3 Vidyapeeth Road
Ph 356844/351395,
Fax 322161
B

Kashika (Indian)
Tourist Bungalow,
Parade Kothi, Opp. Cantt
Ph 208413 / 208545
Fax 511638
C

Mughal (Indian / Chinese)
Baradari, Maidagin
Ph 336252 / 3, Fax 330581
B

Poonam (Indian)
Hotel Pradeep
Jagatganj
Ph 204963
B

Quality (Indian)
Pushpanjali, Lahurabir
Ph 343776
C

Darpan (Indian)
Pallavi International
Hathwa Place, Chetganj
Ph 356939 – 42
B

The Palms (Mughlai/Chinese)
Hindustan International
C-21/3 Maldahiya
Ph 351484 – 90, Fax 350931
A

Ghats Area

Bread of Life Bakery
(Continental)
Shivala
C

Ganga View (Indian)
Assi Ghat
Ph 313218, Fax 313965
C

Haifa (Fast Food)
Assi Ghat
C

Lara India (Indian)
Dasashwamedh Road
Ph 320323, Fax 352221
C

Neelam (Indian)
Diamond Hotel,
B-20/44 Bhelpura
Ph 310695 – 6, Fax 310703
C

Temple (Indian)
Hotel Ganges
Dasashwamedh Road
Ph 321097 / 322753
C

Credit Card
Air-conditioning
Vegetarian
Non-vegetarian

Price Range (for a meal for two persons)

A Above Rs 400
B Rs 150-400
C Below Rs 150

Where to Shop

Varanasi has always been famed for its textiles, especially hand-woven silk. The traditional Banarasi sari, with its silk covered with gold weave, is a legend across India.

While in Varanasi check out the amazing variety of silk and fine cotton cloth, jewellery in gold and silver, especially with the pink enamelling unique to this area. Brass and copperware, wooden and terracotta toys, *papier mache* masks and basketwork are also specialities. Hand-knotted carpets come from nearby Bhadohi and there are beautifully crafted musical instruments and exquisite miniature and folk paintings.

The main shopping areas are in Chowk, Godoulia, Vishwanath Gali, Thatheri Bazaar, Lahurabir, Dasashwamedh Ghat and Golghar. Look for saris in the Chowk and Bansphatak area, metalware in Thatheri Bazaar, wooden toys and baskets in Vishwanath Gali and the area around Dasashwamedh Ghat.

Sarees

Raj Gharana Sarees
Bansphatak Ph 392505

Shreya Sarees
Bansphatak Ph 352359

Banaras Art Palace
Ph 352281 / 327781

Brij Raman Das & Sons
37/132 Golghar, Town Hall
Ph 332672 / 333286

Kala Niketan
Dasashwamedh Lane
Ph 321586

Mehrotra Silk Factory
Englishiya Lane
Ph 345289

Pitambari
Bansphatak

Sagun Sarees
Bansphatak

Jewellery

Jewar Kothi
Ramkatora Crossing
Ph 200639 / 203239

Swarna Kala Kendra
Godoulia
Ph 393031 / 012

Kanaiya Alankar Mandir
Bhulanala
Ph 354951 / 354623

Reena Jewellers
Assi Ghat

Chudamani Arts
Chowk

Mithai Shops

Sri Ram Bhandar
Thatheri Bazar

Madhur Jalpan
Hauz Kathra
Beside Kainiya Chitra Mandir

Raj Bandhu
Kachauri Gali

Kshirsagar
Sonarpura
Ph 324199

Paan

Keshav Paanwala
Lanka Chauraha
Near BHU

Babunandan Paanwala
Thatheri Bazaar

Mandan Maharaj
Chitra Cinema Campus

Ram Narain
Thatheri Bazaar

Thandai

Mishrambu
Godoulia

Thandai Lok
Godoulia

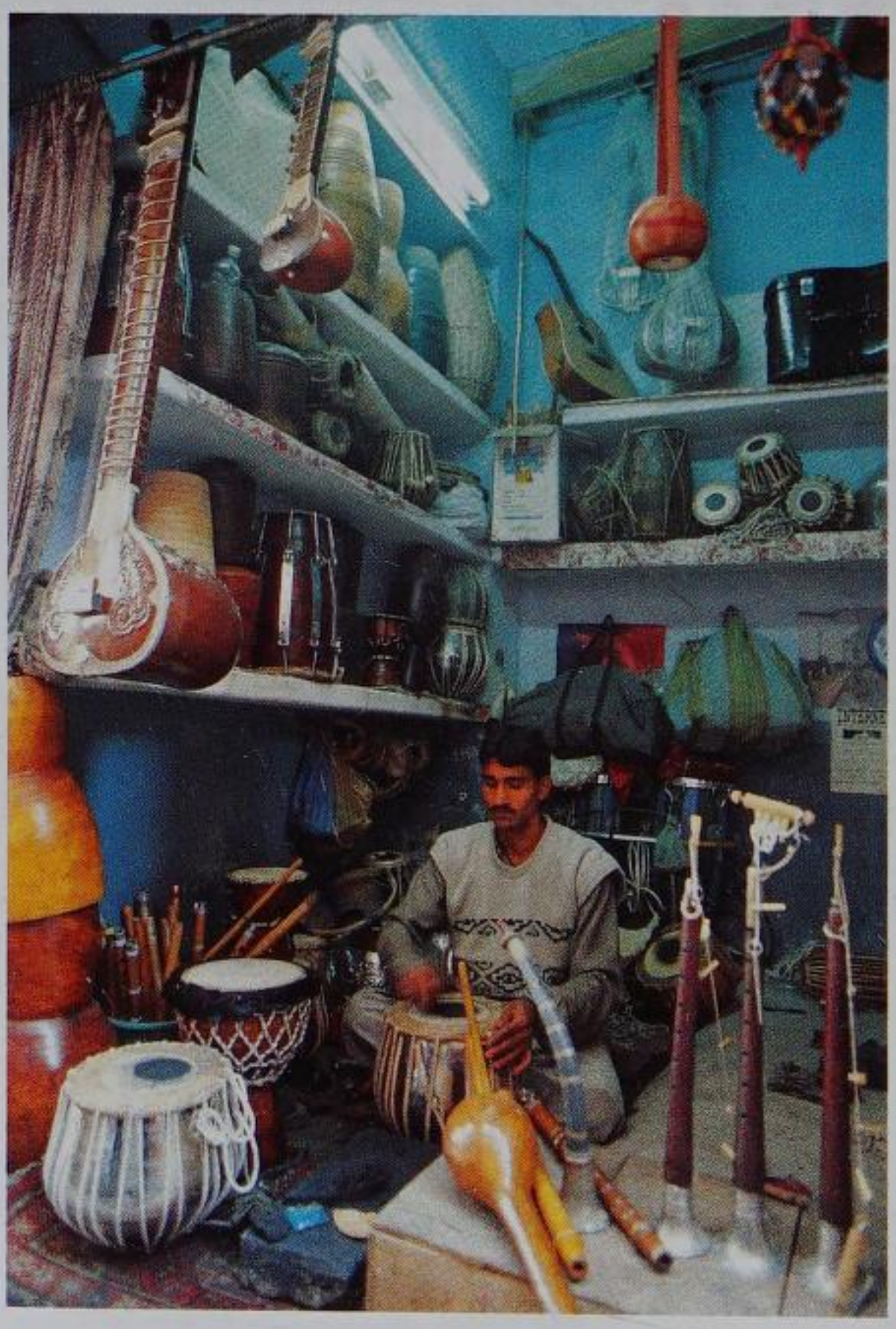
Thandai Corner
Godoulia

Handicrafts & Handloom items

UPICA
- Bansphatak, Ph 352639
- RMO, Ph 210725
- Rathyatra, Ph 320412

UP Handlooms
Bunkar Market

Sri Gandhi Ashram
Maldahiya, Ph 351436



Costumes for Idols

Mohan Shringar Kala Kendra, Thatheri Bazaar

Attar

Ayodhya Prasad Lakshmi Chand, Chowk
(opposite Police Station)

Kashinath & Co
Chowk

Kashi Vishwanath & Co
Chowk

Metalware/Brass Items

Agrawal Kala Kendra
D 10/5, Shakshi Vinayak
Vishwanath Gali
Ph 392301

Banaras Toy Museum
Vishwanath Gali
Ph 392305

Pushpanjali
37/120 A Jagannathpuri
CK 37/36 Bansphatak
Ph 321803

Wooden Toys

Aggarwal Toy Emporium
D 10/56 Vishwanath Gali
Ph 328750 / 393550

JR Ivory Arts & Curios
D-20 Vishwanath Gali
Ph 321772

Books

US Publishers
Sharda Stationery Marg
CK 27/44b Bansphatak
Ph 352240

Gautam Pustak Mandir
Bhulanala, Ph 334336

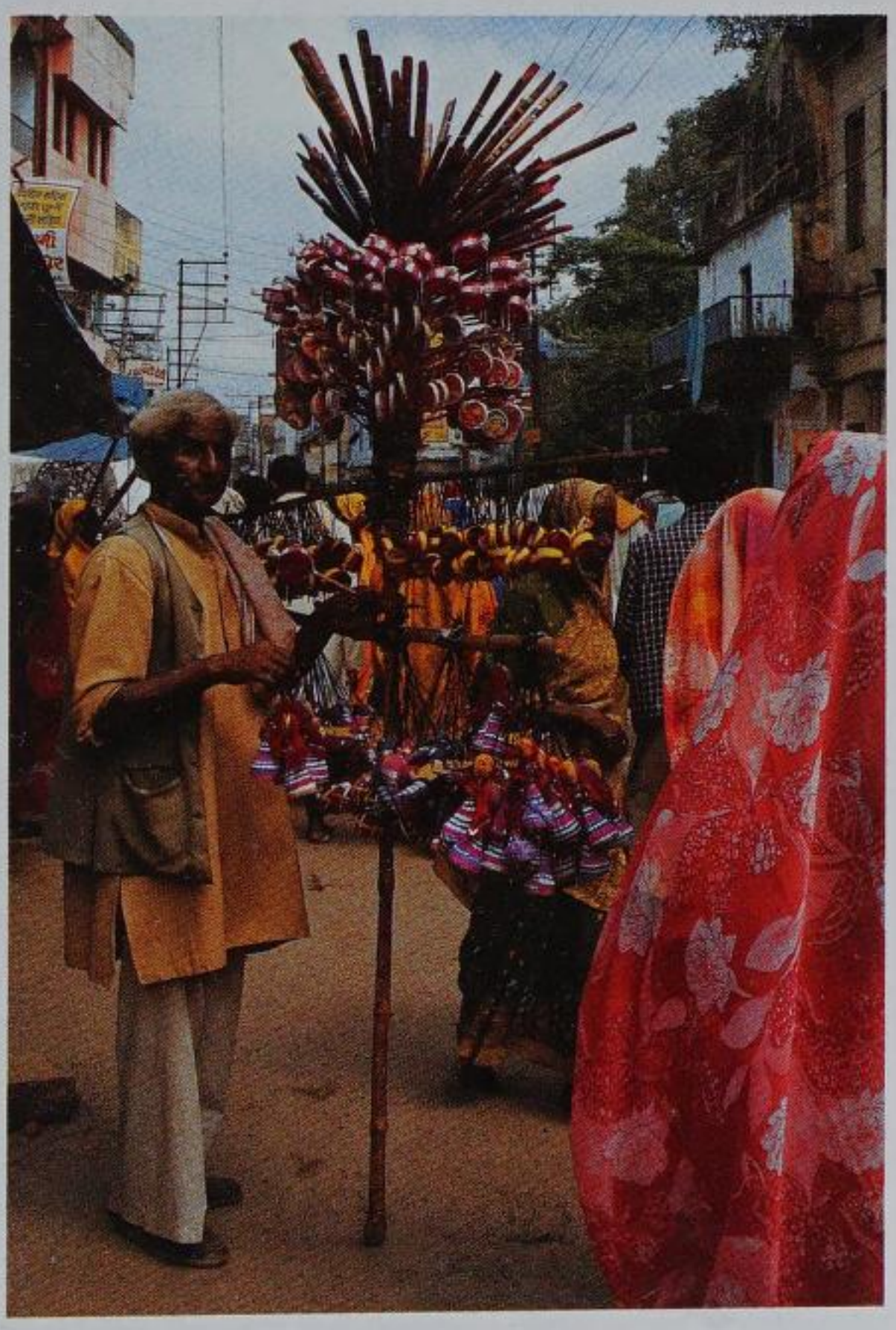
Harmony
B1/100 Assi Ghat

Indica Books
D 40/18 Godoulia
Near Crossing
Ph 321640

Universal
Godoulia, Near Crossing

Chaukamba Sanskrit Bhawan
Chowk

Pilgrims Book House
B 27/98 A-8 Durga Kund
Ph 314060



BRAJ BHOOMI,

THE ENCHANTING LAND OF LORD KRISHNA,

WHERE THE SWEET MELODY OF HIS FLUTE STILL ECHOES.

Vistit **Mathura,** the birthplace of Lord Krishna, **Vrindavan** where he frolicked with the gopis and enchanted Radha with his mesmerising tunes. See the revered Dwarkadheesh Temple, the Ghats, the Kans Qila on the banks of the river Yamuna, the Government Museum with it's fine collection of antiquities from Maurya, Sunga, Kushan and Gupta periods, the temples at **Gokul, Barsana** (home of Radha Rani), **Nandgaon, Baldeo** and **Govardhan.**

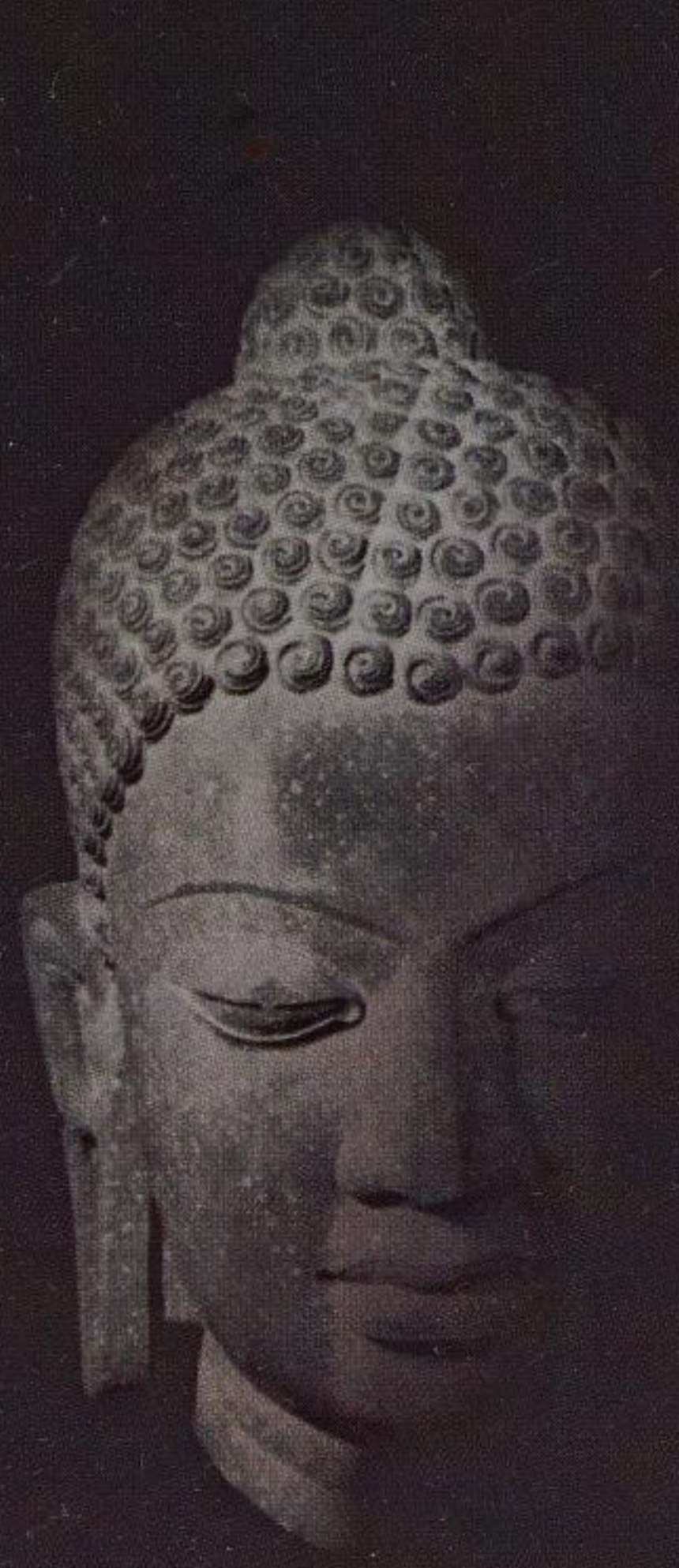
After you've savoured the beauty of the love story of Shri Krishna and Radha, **Agra,** just 50 kms away, will beckon you with the beauty of another love story. That of a mighty Mughal Emperor and his beloved Queen - enshrined in the pristine beauty of the Taj Mahal and other world heritage monuments. You can make yet another stop-over at the fascinating **Patna Bird sanctuary**, just 55kms from Agra.

UTTAR PRADESH

The essence of India

For information, please contact : **Directorate of Tourism,** Chitrahar Building, 3, Naval Kishore Road, Lucknow-226001(U.P.), INDIA. Tel: (91-522) 228349, 225165. Fax:(91-522) 221776.
E-mail : upstdc@sancharnet.in & yatrup@sancharnet.in **Visit our website at :** http://www.up-tourism.com

If you wish to set out on a search for the Bodhi or the ultimate truth may we suggest the places to try first.



From time immemorial, people from all over the world have set their eyes on just one place when it came to the search for the ultimate truth - Uttar Pradesh. It is here that he lived his life and achieved `Nirvana'. It is here, in short, that Buddhism was born. This land epitomises the birth, decline, and finally the resurrection of this great religion. Places like Sarnath, Kaushambi, Sravasti, Kushinagar, Kapilavastu and Sankisa are even today dotted with monuments and relics that speak volumes on this great religion. Home to some of the finest legacies of Buddhism, these places are held in reverence by the devout and a visit here is a must at least once in a lifetime. We invite you to spare a couple of days to visit them for yourself. In search for the ultimate truth. Or just to follow in the footsteps of the Lord.

Buddhist Stupa, Sarnath

Mahaparinirvana Temple, Kushinagar

Buddhist Stupa, Kushinagar

UTTAR PRADESH

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E-mail : upstdc@sancharnet.in & yatrup@sancharnet.in
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Bhartendu Harishchandra (1850-1885)

Bhartendu Harishchandra, the doyen of modern Hindi literature, was one of Varanasi's most illustrious citizens. Baba Bhartendu as he was popularly known was born in 1850 and lost his parents soon after, leaving him without the means of a formal education.

Fired as he was with the urge to learn, and living as he did in Varanasi the city illumined by knowledge, he educated himself at the feet of masters. Blessed with an innate felicity with words, he was an accomplished poet and dramatist before he was out of his teens.

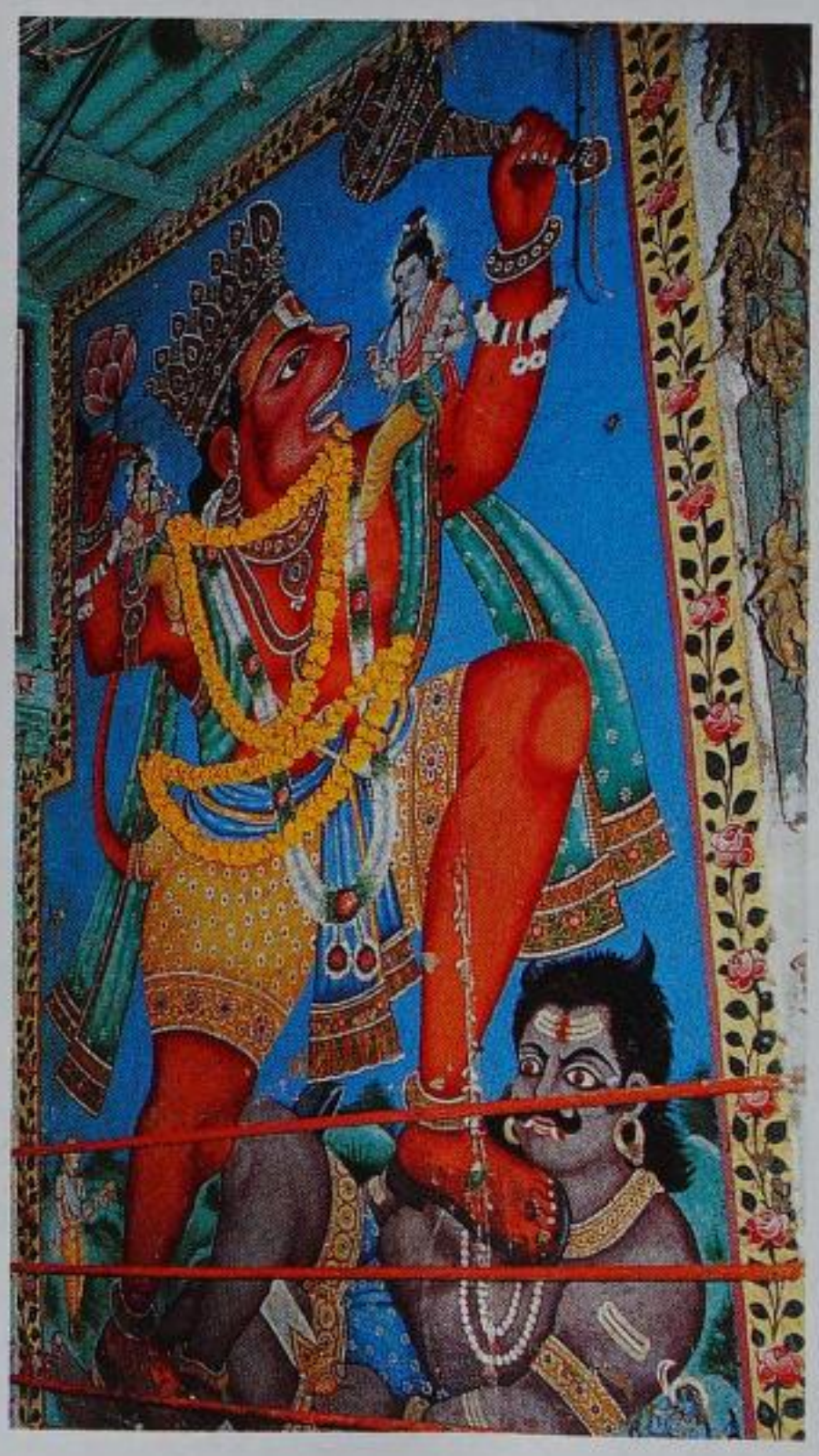
Bhartendu wrote in Hindi, which was then emerging as an independent language, but his works are smattered with words in Braj Bhasha and Khari Boli, the two dominant dialects of northern India. His plays also display the influence of classical Sanskrit drama. Among his most famous works are *Andher Nagari, Satya Harishchandra, Neeldevi* and *Bharat Janani*.

Bharat Kala Bhawan

Open:
Summer 8 am – 12 noon
Winter 9.30 am – 4.30 pm

Closed Sundays

This museum was established in 1920 with the encouragement of eminent Indians like Rabindranath Tagore, Anand Coomaraswamy and Abanindranath Tagore.
It houses an extremely interesting collection of terracotta and sculpture from Varanasi, Sarnath and Mathura. Miniature paintings, illustrated manuscripts, textiles can also be seen here.



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Phrase Book : English-Hindi

Essential words

greeting	*namaste/ namaskar*
yes	*haan*
no	*nahin*
thank you	*dhanyavad/ shukriya*
money	*paisa/rupaye*
time	*samay*
day	*din*
night	*raat*
morning	*subah*
evening	*shaam*
afternoon	*dopeher*
today	*aaj*
tomorrow	*kal*
yesterday	*kal*
here	*idhar/yahan*
there	*udhar/wahan*
food	*khaana*
water	*paani*
girl	*ladki*
boy	*ladka*
woman	*aurat*
man	*aadmi*
who	*kaun*
why	*kyon*
what	*kya*
where	*kahan*
when	*kab*
how	*kaise*
one/two	*ek/do*
hot	*garam*
cold	*thanda*
good	*achha*
bad	*bura*
open	*khula*

Shopping

What is this?
Yeh kya hai?

clothes	*kapda*
shoes	*joota*
big	*bara*
small	*chhota*
black	*kaala*
white	*safed*
red	*lal*
blue	*neela*
yellow	*peela*
green	*hara*

In Emergencies

help!	*bachao!*
stop	*ruko*
medicines	*davai*

Please call a doctor/ ambulance
doctor/ambulance ko bulaiye

Where is the nearest hospital?
nazdeek hospital kahan hai?

I'm not feeling well
Meri tabiyat theek nahin hai

Where is...?
Kahan hai...?

When will... be back?
...vaapas kab ayenge?

Call the police
Police ko bulaiye

close	*band*
left	*baayen*
right	*daayen*
near	*paas*
far	*door*
up	*oopar*
down	*neeche*
outside	*bahar*
inside	*andar*
fast	*jaldi*
slow	*dheere*
car	*gaadi*
bus	*bus*
road	*sadak*
way	*raasta*

house	*ghar, makaan*
door	*darwaaza*
fan	*pankha*
electricity	*bijlee*
train	*train, rail gaadi*
aeroplane	hawai jahaz

Useful Phrases

How are you?
Aap kaise hain?

Very well, thank you
Hum theek hain, dhanyavad

What is your name?
Aap ka naam kya hai?

My name is...
Mera naam...hai

See you
Phir milenge

What is the time?
Kitna baja hai?

Where are you from?
Aap kahan se aaye hain?

Do you speak English?
Kya aap angrezi bolte hain?

Do you have change?
Khule paise milenge?

Do you have...
Aap ke paas...hai?

How much does this cost?
Yeh kitne ka hai ?

Do you take credit cards?
Aap credit card lete hain?

How far is...
Kitna door hai?

Tips or *Baksheesh*

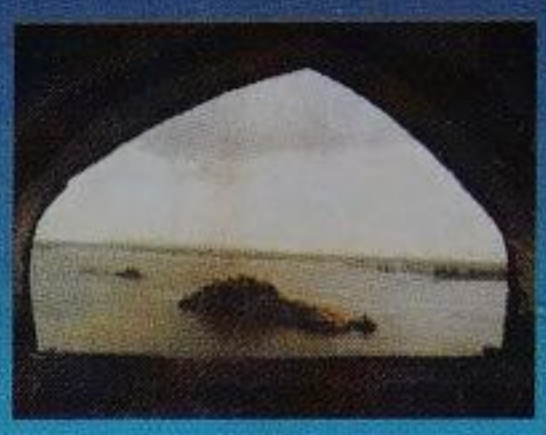
There is no rule which compels you to tip anyone for any service rendered. Courtesy demands that you tip a waiter in a restaurant or hotel.

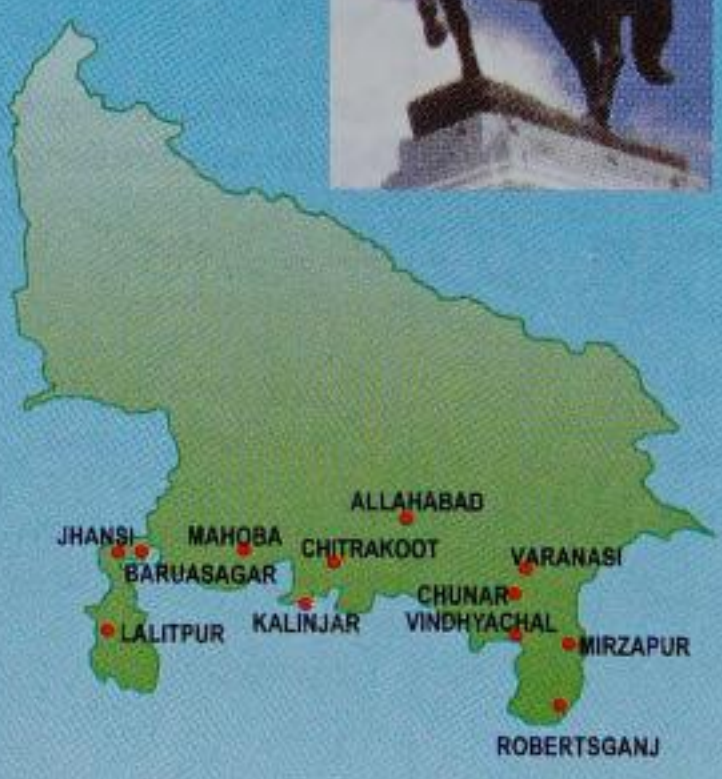
The general norm is to pay 10% of the billed amount. Taxis, auto-rickshaws, public transport staff, government officials or private service providers are not expected to be tipped. It is entirely up to you to tip someone for services rendered. Sometimes the urge to tip can be misunderstood, as it may be considered an assault on dignity.

UTTAR PRADESH

The essence of India

The Rain God invites you to rediscover holidaying pleasures!





Bundelkhand and Vindhyachal, the land of divine legends – Uttar Pradesh's 'Indradesh'. Step off the beaten track and head for a holiday like never before. Welcome to India's monsoon wonderworld. Soak your spirits under the cascade of rippling waterfalls.Lose yourself in ancient bylanes of history. Conquer impregnable forts. Catch reflections of peace and serenity on the cool waters of beautiful lakes. Let the spirit of adventure reign supreme...

Bundelkhand & Vindhyachal Hills

IDEAL MONSOON DESTINATIONS

JHANSI • MAHOBA • KALINJAR • CHITRAKOOT • LALITPUR • BARUASAGAR • DEOGARH • CHUNAR • VINDHYACHAL • TANDA • SIRSI • WYNDHAM • DEODARI • CHANDRAPRABHA Wildlife Sanctuary

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E-mail : upstdc@sancharnet.in & yatrup@sancharnet.in **Visit our website at :** http://www.up-tourism.com

naa/UPT/123/2K

GLOSSARY

aarti the high point in traditional *puja* where the priest worships the idol with oil lamps, accompanied by ringing of bells and the blowing of conch shells

achaar pickle

akhara arena or gymnasium; a place for wrestling

artha riches, wealth

ashram hermitage; in ancient times these were centres of learning

attar floral perfume traditionally used by Muslims

Avimukta the City Never Forsaken (by Shiva); one of the scriptural names for the holy city of Kashi

ayurveda literally, the knowledge of life, an ancient system of healing based on the teachings of the Vedic *rishis* or sages

Baba literally, old man; an appellative for father; Shiva

baiji courtesan; the *baijis* of Varanasi are famed for keeping alive the tradition of classical Hindustani music and dance

Benaras/Banaras anglicised version of Varanasi, the city located between the rivers Varuna and Assi. The ancient Hindu name for the city is Kashi (see below). After India gained independence Varanasi was declared the formal name for the city

barfi traditional, milk-based sweet

bazaar, bazar marketplace.

Bhagirathi the river that emerges from Gangotri and joins with other mountain streams to form the mighty Ganga; named for king Bhagirath who, mythology says, was instrumental in bringing the Ganga down from the heavens.

Bhairava Lord Shiva in his terrible, fearful form.

Bhakti literally, devotion. A devotional movement in Hinduism which arose in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and was marked by a rejection of rituals. Most of the saints of this period, like Kabir, Surdas, Tulsi Das and Meerabai were also poets and this philosophy is also considered to have given birth to a school of Hindi literature.

bhang a derivative of cannabis, either smoked in dried form in a *chillum*, or ground to a paste and added to *thandai*. Associated with the worship of Shiva and so was a sanctioned indulgence of *sadhus* and ascetics.

Brahma one of the Hindu trinity; to Brahma is attributed the creation of the cosmos.

Brahmin the priestly caste; the highest of the four castes in the hierarchical Hindu social order of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra.

chaat a tangy and spicy savoury snack often sold at roadside stalls

chakra wheel; the discus, Vishnu's favoured weapon

chauki stool

damru Shiva's rattledrum

Deepavali/Diwali, the festival of lights; one of the most important Hindu festivals celebrated in October-November. It is believed that on this day Lord Rama came home to Ayodhya after a 14-year exile and oil lamps were lit all over his kingdom to welcome him

dharma translated variously as the natural law, the truth, the teachings of the enlightened ones; religion, social order, morality and righteousness

dholak a small drum

dhoop incence sticks

dhoti traditional men's wear – fine white cloth wrapped around the lower part of the body

Dhrupad one of the nine forms of music in the Hindustani classical system. It is the oldest vocal style, which can be traced to the ancient Hindu text, *Sama Veda*

diya small earthenware lamps

dohas couplets. Those composed by Kabir are widely read even today

dom the sweeper or scavenger class among the Hindus

dosha humours; *ayurveda* has it that individuals are a sum of three *doshas, pitta, kapha* and *vayu*

gadidar wholesaler

gali narrow lane

Gangajal water from the river Ganga, considered holy by Hindus

gharana a particular style of Hindustani classical music which is passed on from one generation to the next by the teacher to the pupil

ghat bathing place on the banks of rivers with steps leading down to it

GLOSSARY

ghatia the priests who have ancestral rights to perform rites and rituals at the *ghats*

Ghazal form of poetry written in Urdu, which is set to music

ghee clarified butter

guru a teacher; one who shows the way

Holi Hindu festival of colours celebrated on the day of the full moon in the month of Phalguna (February-March)

Janamashtami festival celebrating the birth of Lord Krishna in July-August

Jataka the 547 *Jatakas* or Birth stories are allegorical tales relating the Buddha's previous births

jyotirlinga linga of light

kama pursuit of love and pleasure, sexual love

Kamasutra the ancient Indian treatise on sex written by Vatsyayana

karma literally action; the consequences resulting from action in previous births; the doctrine of *karma* governs human and other beings. According to Brahmanical Hinduism the individual soul or self must purify itself of its *karma* and merge with the universal spirit, Brahman

Kashi the luminous city, the city of light; traditional name for Varanasi

Kathak north Indian classical dance form, born in the Awadh region of modern Uttar Pradesh and flowered under the *nawabs*; popularised by the graceful courtesans of Varanasi and Lucknow

Khayal a Persian verb that literally means idea or imagination; one of the nine forms of music in the Hindustani classical style, said to have been evolved by Amir Khusro

kohl collyrium, applied to the eyes to darken them

laddu round, yellow or saffron coloured sweetmeats

lassi thick, churned curd either salted or sweetened, a cooling drink for the summer months

leela literally, play; divine play, e.g., Ram Leela

linga phallus; the Shiva *linga* is worshipped as the male principle. Also, gender – in Sanskrit and some other Indian languages all objects are classified as either masculine, feminine or neuter gender

Mahabharata Sanskrit epic composed by sage Vyasa in which is depicted the battle between good and evil as personified by the Pandavas and Kauravas

Makara Sankranti time when the sun enters the mansion of Capricorn; festival celebrating this, sometime in the middle of January

mandir temple

Manikarnika literally, jewelled earrings. The most important cremation ghat in Varanasi, named after Parvati's earrings that are said to have fallen at this site

mantra sacred chant; a prayer

masti youthful exuberance and zest for life

matha religious centre which function as places of worship and have residential quarters as well

mehfil musical soiree

mela fair, especially on the occasion of a religious festival

mohalla locality

moksha ultimate liberation from the endless cycle of life, death and rebirth

mrityu death

mujra an evening of music and dance by accomplished courtesans

mukti liberation; release

mundan ritual shaving of the head

namkaran naming ceremony

Nataraj literally, the king of dance; Shiva in cosmic pose

nirvana enlightenment; the death of craving, detachment; *nirvana* is experienced by a person who has eliminated the notion of self

paan a conically-folded betel leaf, filled with areca nuts, lime and often with extras like cardamoms and cloves. Traditionally offered at the end of a meal, *paan* is said to have digestive properties

Panchang the Hindu spiritual almanac that takes into account five (*panch*) astral aspects (*ang*)

panda Brahmins who serve the needs of pilgrims; assisting them to perform religious ceremonies and visit temples and ghats

Parvati consort of Shiva

pindadaan offering of special food, usually balls of rice and other grains, to the dead by Hindu male descendants

pitripaksha the fortnight annually dedicated over to ancestor worship

puja personal form of worship

punya spiritual merit; a good or meritorious act

purnima full moon day of the Hindu lunar calendar

Ramayana Sanskrit epic composed by sage Valmiki in which is represented the victory of Lord Rama over the demon king of Lanka, Ravana

rishi sage

roti flattened wheat bread. There are different kinds of *rotis* like *chapatis, khasta rotis, roomali rotis, tandoori rotis* and so on

sadhu holy man, generally an ascetic living on alms

samsara river of life; the endless cycle of life, death and rebirth

sangha the Buddhist community of monks and nuns, founded by the Buddha in Sarnath

Sanskrit classical Indian language in which the Hindu religious texts were written

sarangi bow instrument best suited as an accompaniment in the Hindustani classical tradition

shakti energy, strength; used to denote the female principle involved in creation; also the generic term for goddess

Shankaracharya the eighth century philosopher-saint who is the main exponent of the non-dualistic philosophy called Advaita; also known as Adi Shankara. Shankara is another name of Shiva and *acharya* means teacher

shehnai wind instrument

shikhara temple spire; literally mountain peak

Shiva together with Brahma and Vishnu, Shiva forms the Hindu trinity of gods; generally perceived as the most fearful, on account of his angry and ascetic mien

shraadh funeral rites performed for ancestors

shringara one of the nine *rasas* or essences of classical Indian aesthetic theory; *shringara* rasa is the sentiment of love between the sexes

sindur red powder applied on the parting of the hair by women to indicate their marital status

stupa a dome-shaped Buddhist reliquary

tabla a percussion instrument, primarily used in Hindustani classical music as an accompaniment to vocal music

tandava Shiva's dance of cosmic destruction

thandai a milk-based drink with nuts and spices, often spiked with *bhang*

Thumri a style of singing in the Hindustani classical tradition

tirtha pilgrimage

trishul trident

Tulsi Das Sixteenth century poet who wrote the epic, *Ramcharitmanas*

ustad an expert, teacher

vahana literally, vehicle. In Hindu mythology, most gods and goddesses are depicted as travelling by a *vahana*, usually an animal or a bird

Vedas literally, texts of knowledge. Earliest and holiest of the Hindu religious texts (c1500 BC-600 BC); the wisdom in the form of hymns, contained in the Vedas is said to be divinely revealed. The four *Vedas* are *Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda* and *Atharva Veda*

vidhwa widow

Vishnu the preserver of the universe and a part of the Hindu trinity; his ten incarnations include Rama and Krishna

wala a suffix forming compound nouns to indicate a person residing in a particular area (e.g., Dilliwala) or selling something (e.g., paanwala)

yagna religious sacrifice in which offerings are made to a sacred pyre

yatra journey

yoga literally, communion or union; a physical and mental discipline that helps the individual subsume himself in the godhead

yuga age; Hindu philosophy divides creation into four yugas – Krita, Treta, Dwapara and Kali. We are presently in the Kali yuga, the age of strife.

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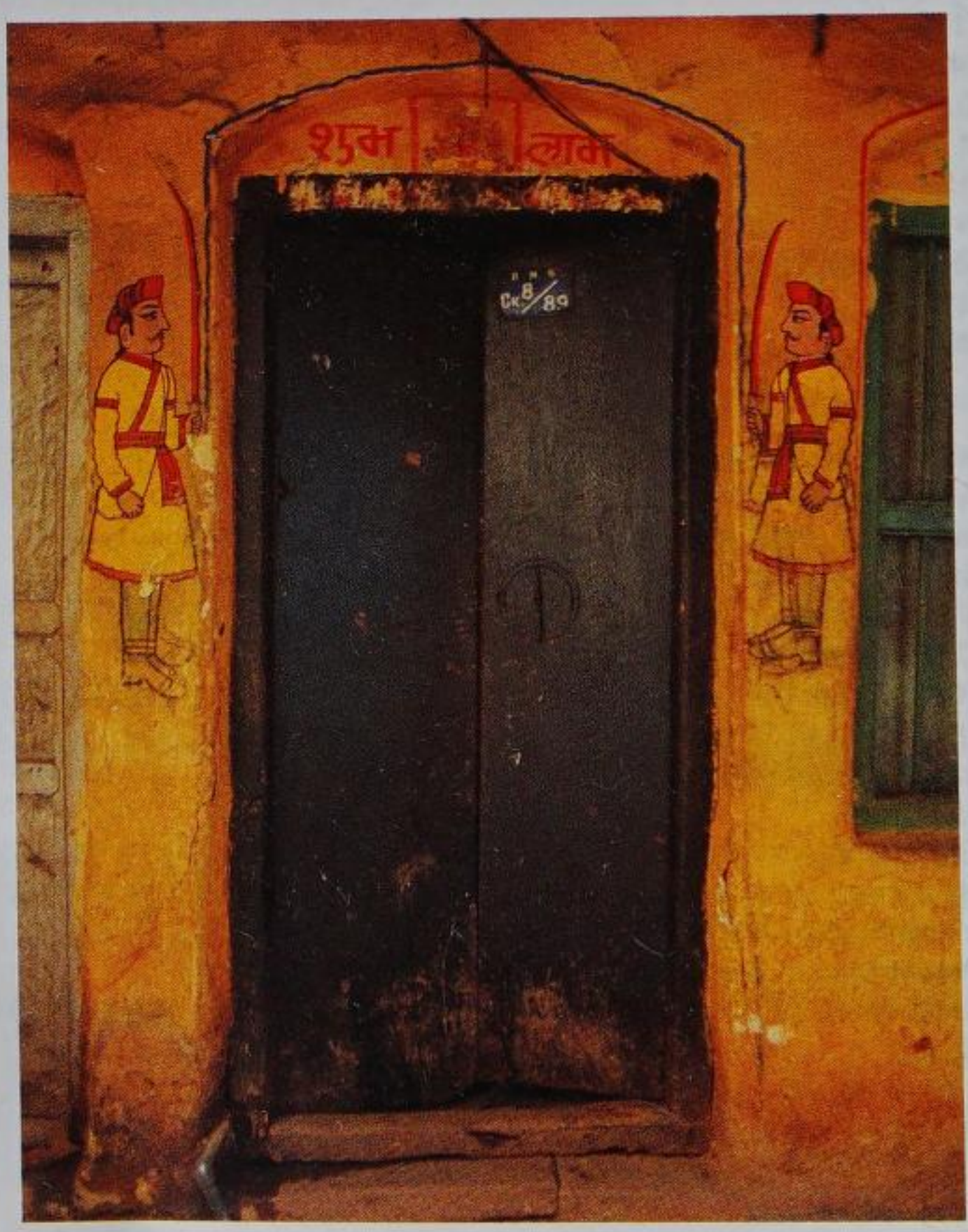

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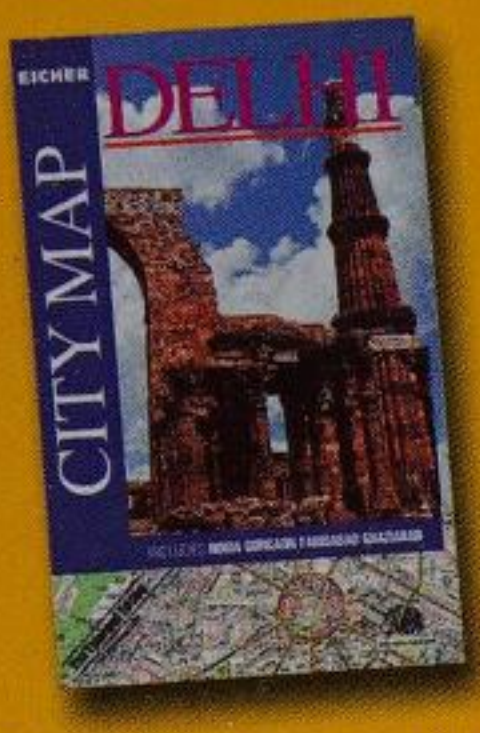

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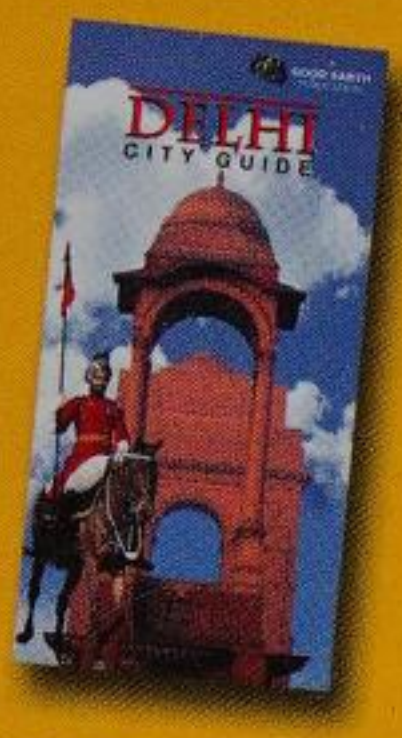

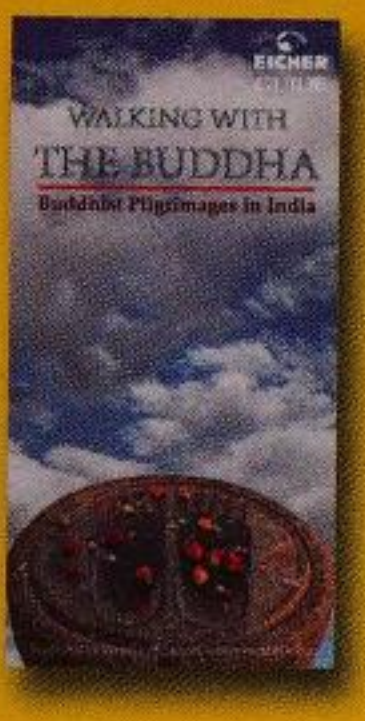

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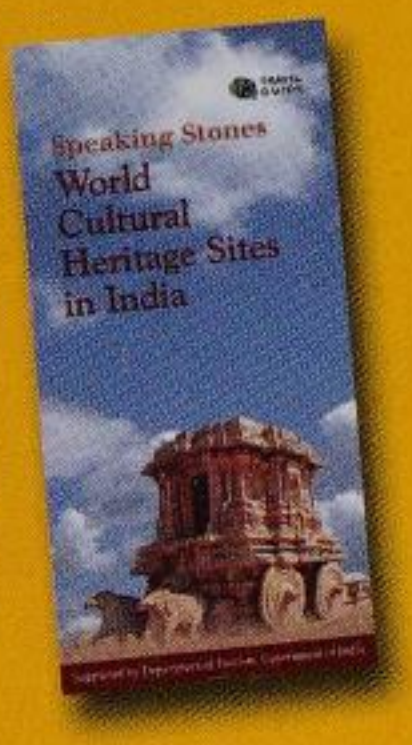

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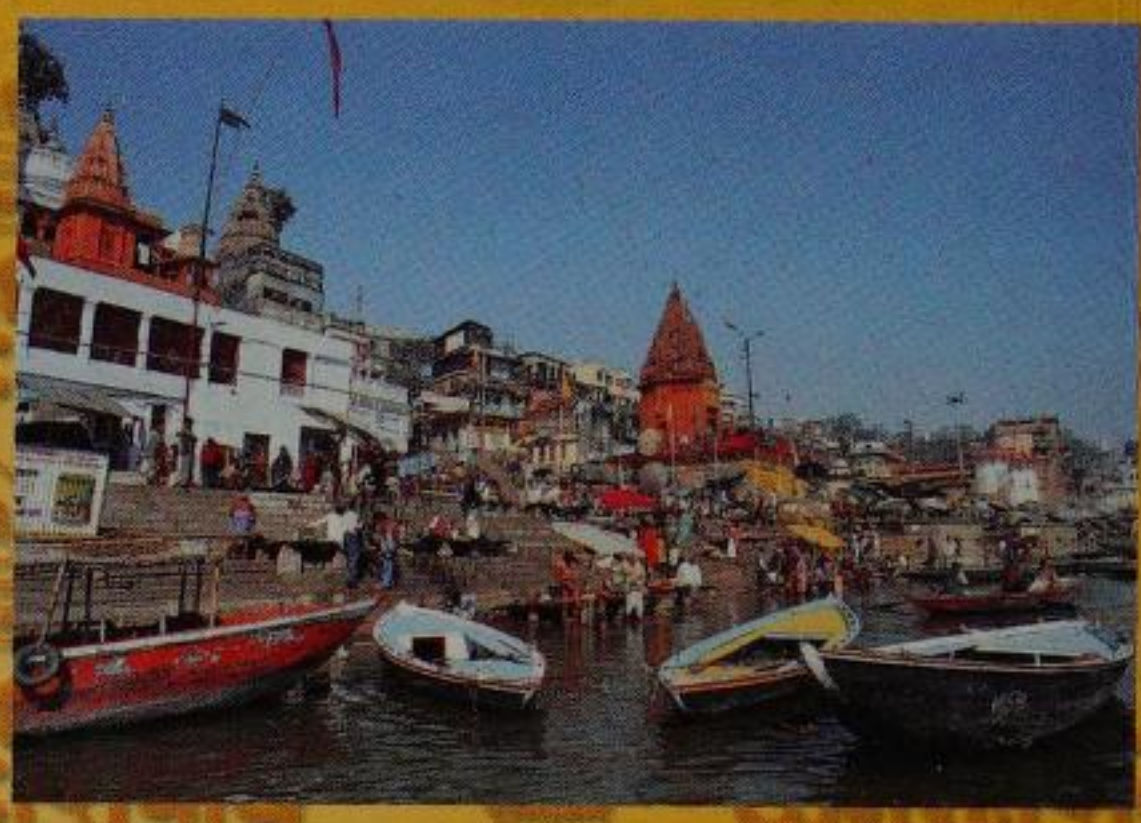

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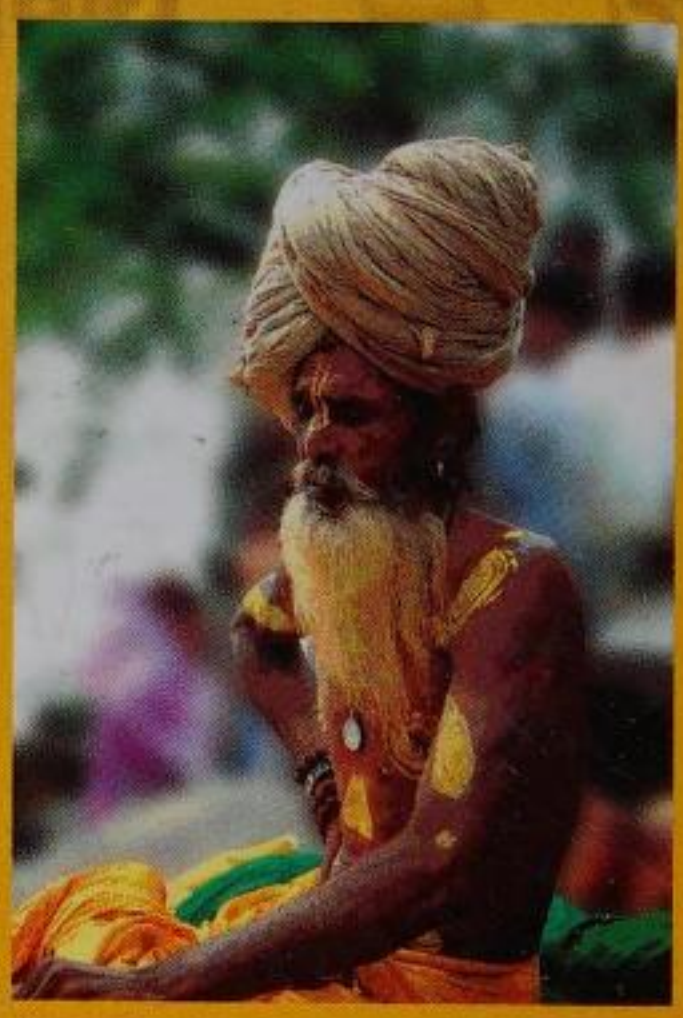

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